THE SPECTACULAR NOW

by

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Based on the novel by Tim Tharp

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OVER BLACK, we hear a teenage voice:

VOICE (O.S.)
“Question number two. Describe a challenge, hardship or misfortune you have experienced in your life.

FADE IN:

EXTREME CLOSE UP on a single BEAD OF SWEAT. The skin it belongs to is out of focus.

VOICE (O.S.)
What have you learned from this and how has it prepared you for the future?”

The lone bead of sweat begins its slow descent.

RACK FOCUS on the bead of sweat to REVEAL the “skin” is actually a beer bottle.

And then we SLOWLY PULL BACK to show who the voice and beer belong to: SUTTER KEELY, 18, boyishly handsome, killer smile. He takes a swig of the beer, staring at a college application on his computer.

As he thinks about the answer, we get a glimpse of Sutter’s room. A small desk. A twin bed. Clothes on the floor. Decorations include a baseball pennant from some minor league team and a framed photo of the Rat Pack.

BACK ON Sutter, staring down the application. An idea comes to him. He starts to type.

SUTTER (V.O.)
“Dear... Dean of Admissions... My name is Sutter Keely and up until yesterday I had the best fucking girlfriend in the world.”

INT CASSIDY’S LIVING ROOM - DAY

CASSIDY (18, Scandinavian blonde, pure soft skin, hot) takes off her shirt, revealing her voluptuous body. She’s on top of Sutter, who lies on his back on the floor. Sutter looks up at her, can’t believe how lucky he is.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - SAME

Sutter types.

SUTTER’S VOICE
I know I probably shouldn’t say “fuck” right there but I’m sorry, I have to.
INT CASSIDY’S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Naked, Cassidy grinds on Sutter. Getting into it. Her eyes are closed. She’s in control.

SUTTER’S VOICE
She’s tremendous. High definition. And so damn beautifully fat. Like, in a good way. You know what I mean? Immaculate proportions. I dated Cassidy two months longer than anyone else. It was magic.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - SAME

Sutter stops typing. Takes another drink. Mulls something over.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Shit. I’m getting ahead of myself. Let’s start at the beginning.

EXT CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - MORNING

Sutter pulls into the parking lot of a suburban strip mall off the highway. There’s a vast openness in every direction. The horizon unsettlingly far away.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Like all great stories, mine begins with a breakfast burrito...

Sutter gets out of his car and notices, in front of the store, a YOUNG KID (8), hands in his pockets, kicking a rock.

SUTTER
Hey little man, you ok?
(no answer)
Shouldn’t you be in school or something?

The Kid shrugs. Sutter nods to him as he walks:

INT CONVENIENCE STORE - SAME

Sutter goes to the soft drink counter and pours himself a Big Gulp of 7UP. The Kid follows him inside. As the Clerk rings Sutter up, the Kid sheepishly tugs on his shirt.

YOUNG KID
Can I borrow a dollar?

SUTTER
What do you need a dollar for?

YOUNG KID
Three Musketeers.
SUTTER
How bout a tasty breakfast burrito? On me.

YOUNG KID
And a Three Musketeers?

SUTTER
(laughs; to the Clerk)
You heard him.

EXT CONVENIENCE STORE - MINUTES LATER

Sutter and the Kid exit the store. Sutter has his Big Gulp. Kid has his breakfast. Sutter is about to walk away when he realizes -- this Kid isn’t going anywhere.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Granted I was late to pick up Cass for school. But I couldn’t just leave him on the side of the road, could I?

INT SUTTER’S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Sutter drives and Walter sits next to him. Barren branches on the tree-lined streets.

SUTTER
So where to my good man?

WALTER
Florida.

SUTTER
(surprised)
Florida?

WALTER
I’m going to see my Dad.

This effects Sutter, who turns to look at the Kid.

SUTTER
What’s, uh, what’s he doing there?

WALTER
He was fighting a lot. With my Mom. She made him leave us.

SUTTER
No shit, dude! High five!
(off his confused look)
Same thing happened to me and my sister!

WALTER
Really?
SUTTER
Mm-hmm. I was 8 or 9. Just like you. My Dad was the best...

Sutter takes a drink from his Big Gulp. His heart breaking for this kid.

SUTTER
You’re really going, huh?

Walter nods.

SUTTER
Well good for you, kid. I think that’s very brave.
(beat)
Got any money?
(he doesn’t)
Cash? Credit cards...? Nothing like that?
You know Florida’s pretty far, right?
What if you get hungry?
(he shrugs)
Well you’re gonna need food, aren’t you?

WALTER
I could hunt it.

SUTTER
Ha. That’s true. You could hunt it. You got a gun? Knife? Fishing rod, at least...?

WALTER
I have a baseball bat.

SUTTER
That could work! Where’s your bat?

WALTER
It’s at home.

SUTTER
Hmm. You know what I think? I think maybe we should go get your bat.

WALTER
But we can’t. My mom is there.

SUTTER
What if I talk to her? Explain the situation.

WALTER
I don’t know...
SUTTER
Hey, you’re with the Sutterman.
(takes a big drink)
Don’t you worry bout a thing.

EXT WALTER’S HOUSE - LATER
Sutter knocks. WALTER’S MOM (late 20s, pretty) opens it.

WALTER’S MOM
Walter!? What are you doing out of school?

SUTTER
Pardon me, ma’am, but, uh, Walter’s sort of upset.

The Woman looks at Walter who looks away. At which point she looks at the Big Gulp, then back up at Sutter.

WALTER’S MOM
Who are you?

SUTTER
My name’s Sutter Keely. I found him over at the 7/11.

WALTER’S MOM
(beat; smells something)
Have you been drinking?

SUTTER
Uh, no ma’am.
(already backing away)
Just thought you might like your kid back, that’s all. I’m gonna go now.

And once at his car:

SUTTER
By the way... you are just stunning to look at.

The Woman eyes Sutter one last beat, then walks inside, angrily slamming the door behind her. Sutter shakes his head -- the nerve of some people -- gets in his car.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Moms... what can I tell ya?

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - AGAIN

ANGLE ON a framed picture by his bedside, showing Sutter (5) on the shoulders of a HANDSOME MAN, his father.

Back on Sutter, at his desk, as he continues typing:
SUTTER (V.O.)
I enjoy a drink from time to time. For me, it's like a hobby.

EXT HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MORNING

Sutter parks his Mitsubishi Lancer. He takes a swig from a flask before walking into school.

SUTTER (V.O.)
A pleasant diversion from all the annoying responsibilities that come with being a kid.

EXT HIGH SCHOOL - GYM CLASS - DAY

The class runs laps around the track. We see Sutter in the middle of the pack running backwards, smiling. Kids crack up at his antics.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Gym class.

INT SUTTER’S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Sutter’s family sits at the table. Mom MARY, sister HOLLY, Holly’s husband JOE. The family says “Grace” and with their eyes closed, Sutter seizes the opportunity for a quick drink.

SUTTER
Xmas Dinner with my family.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - AGAIN

SUTTER
This essay.

Sutter takes another sip. Continues.

EXT HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Sutter reveals, from beneath his T-shirt, a keg tap. PARTYGOERS cheer and applaud. Sutter is the man.

SUTTER (V.O.)
People talk about the dangers of drinking, how harmful it is... Nobody talks about the good stuff. How great it feels. How much fun it can be.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Sutter does shots with friends, including Cassidy.

- Sutter standing up on a couch leading the room in a song.
- Sutter diving into a pool fully clothed. Partygoers follow him in. Over which we hear:

  SUTTER (V.O.)
  When I’m drinking, it’s like I can see another dimension to the world. Words and ideas I never knew I had come flying out of me. I’m funny, compassionate, in love with everything.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - AGAIN

Sutter typing.

  SUTTER (V.O.)
  Besides, it’s not like I’m some toothless derelict drinking by himself late at night. I’m 18. This is what I’m supposed to be doing.

Sutter takes another swig. Confident now. He continues:

EXT CASSIDY’S HOUSE - DAY

Sutter knocks on the door. No answer. He can hear loud, angry music blaring from inside.

  SUTTER (V.O.)
  So meanwhile, thanks to Walter, I’m late to pick my girlfriend up for school.


  SUTTER
  Shit.

Sutter walks around back. He sizes up the large tree next to the house. Takes a sip from his cup.

QUICK JUMP CUTS of SUTTER:

- climbing the tree, Big Gulp in hand
- leaping to the roof, Big Gulp in his teeth
- lunging for the Big Gulp and losing his grip on the roof
- hanging from the gutter when Cassidy appears at the window:

  CASSIDY
  Sutter?!

  SUTTER
  Hey gorgeous.
CASSIDY
What are you -- ?

The gutter rips from the side of the house, taking Sutter down with it. He lands hard on his tailbone with a yelp. Cassidy stands over him, arms crossed, livid.

INT CASSIDY’S LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Sutter sits on the couch, rubbing his injuries. Cassidy paces as she reprimands Sutter.

CASSIDY
Do you even remember what we talked about?

SUTTER
(no idea)
Of... course I do.

SUTTER’S VOICE
I had absolutely no idea what she’s talking about.

Cassidy’s lips move as she continues her rant but all we hear is:

SUTTER’S VOICE
She’s always saying something or other and I try to listen, honest to God, but I mean... look at her.

CASSIDY
Cause it’s the last time I’m gonna say it.

SUTTER
I...’m with you. 100 percent.

CASSIDY
Promise?

SUTTER
Cross my heart, hope to die. (beat)
Now how bout a kiss?

Cassidy tries to stay mad at Sutter but it’s virtually impossible. He throws her that smile and her resolve crumbles. They quickly undress and start getting into it. Sutter looks up at her. Can’t believe how lucky he is.

SUTTER (V.O.)
What can I say, I’m a romantic. I am in love with the feminine species. It’s a shame you only get to pick one, but since that’s the rule, I was very grateful for the one I had.
EXT LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Home of the Plainsmen.

    SUTTER (V.O.)
    Well the next day, it all went to shit.

A bell rings, signaling the end of the day. Kids spill out of the building and head in all directions.

    SUTTER (V.O.)
    You remember high school. Everyone’s got their thing.

ANGLE ON a tough-looking jock with a varsity jacket.

    SUTTER (V.O.)
    Denver Quigley, his thing is sports.

ANGLE ON a long-haired kid in a back Jim Morrison shirt.

    SUTTER (V.O.)
    Josh Green. Biggest Doors fan in the state.

ANGLE ON Sutter, who stands by the entrance with his best friend RICKY (18, undersized, Indian-American). Sutter points to a girl. Ricky shakes his head no.

    SUTTER (V.O.)
    My best friend Ricky... he’s Indian.

Sutter points to another. Again, Ricky rejects.

    SUTTER (V.O.)
    And me, my thing is making people feel good. I’m the fun guy. Just like my dad. There’s no feeling down when ol’ Sutter’s around.

SUTTER

Colleen Marshall?

RICKY

Way too tall. I’d look like her son.

SUTTER

That’s it. I’m tired of your excuses. I say, “tonight’s the night.”

RICKY

What night?

SUTTER

The night I get you some action.
INT/EXT SUTTER’S CAR - DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

Cars zoom by as Sutter and Ricky drive extra slow with the windows down, scoping left and right for something or someone to perk up the evening. It may be “Downtown” but there’s little to do. Ricky pulls out a blaze and lights it. Sutter sips from his Big Gulp.

RICKY
I don’t know about this.

SUTTER
Relax.

From behind the car, headlights flash. Sutter squints through the rearview. See two girls waving excitedly. Sutter smiles.

RICKY (CONT’D)
What is it?

SUTTER
Potential.

Sutter pulls into a shopping plaza. The girls’ car pulls up alongside him. The driver is BETHANY, the passenger TARA.

SUTTER (CONT’D)
Hi Tara. Bethany.

TARA
Just the man I was looking for. Know where we can score some beers?

SUTTER
(does he ever)
Step into my office ladies.

Sutter gets out and gestures to the back of his car. He pops the trunk, revealing that he’s turned the trunk into a cooler -- it’s filled to the brim with ice and beer.

TARA
My hero.

SUTTER
Bethany, you know Ricky don’t you?

Ricky awkwardly waves. Bethany awkwardly waves back.

TARA
So what’s your plan for tonight?

SUTTER
(laughs)
Plans? You know me better than that. I don’t plan, I improvise.
Sutter looks around.

SUTTER
You guys up for a boat ride?

Off their faces we...

CUT TO:

EXT CANALS - NIGHT

A canal runs between two long rows of buildings like a river at the bottom of a canyon. Sutter helps Ricky and Bethany get on the boat.

SUTTER'S VOICE
It takes me all of 30 seconds to get them alone.

SUTTER
Oh shit. I left my wallet in the car.

RICKY
I have enough --

SUTTER (hinting)
No dude, don’t worry about it. You guys go ahead. I’ll run back and get it.
(to Tara)
You’ll come with me, right?

TARA
Sure.

As the boat floats away Sutter winks at Ricky, who’s now ‘trapped’ on the boat with Bethany.

SUTTER (calling after them)
See you guys in a bit.

Ricky looks at Bethany and can only shrug.

Back on land:

SUTTER
Want some ice cream?

TARA
I thought you lost your wallet.

SUTTER (pulls it out of his pocket)
Hey, whaddaya know?

TARA
You’re terrible.
SUTTER
They make a cute couple, don’t they?

INT SUTTER’S CAR – LATER
Sutter and Tara are drinking. A baseball game plays on the radio.

TARA
I can’t wait to get out of this place.
Can we put on some music or something?

SUTTER
No I like this.

Tara thinks this strange but doesn’t say so.

It’s at this point when a car comes careening into the parking lot. Sutter and Tara turn. Cassidy storms out of the car. Furious.

SUTTER
(upbeat)
Hey Cass --

CASSIDY
Can I speak to you in private please?

Sutter goes to give Cass a hug but she pushes him off.

CASSIDY
Kendra said she saw you with Tara. I didn’t believe her.

SUTTER
Uh, yeah, the girls wanted some beers so--

CASSIDY
I asked you to do one thing for me. One. And you still couldn’t do it.

SUTTER
What are you so mad about? What thing?

CASSIDY
I asked you to put someone else’s feelings before your own. For once in your life!

SUTTER
Wait a sec. That is what I’m doing!

CASSIDY
Oh please --

SUTTER
It’s the truth! Ask Ricky. I’m just here to --
CASSIDY
You’re the most selfish person I’ve ever met.

SUTTER
Are you hearing me? I’m doing this for Ricky. I’m completely unselfish.

Cassidy sees Tara in the car, beer in hand. Tara looks away, like she knows she was doing something wrong.

CASSIDY
You’re a lost cause, Sutter.

SUTTER
Cass, you gotta believe me --

CASSIDY
I’m sorry. No. We’re done.

SUTTER
Cassidy!

It’s too late. She gets in the car and drives off. Sutter stands there. Buzzed enough to not be upset. Yet.

EXT SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AGAIN

We’re back with Sutter. He looks up from the page. Thinks for a moment, and then continues writing:

SUTTER (V.O.)
A misunderstanding. No big deal. She’d come around, right? Well listen to this. Fucking last night...

INT SUTTER’S CAR - AGAIN

Sutter drives crosstown, the sound of a baseball announcer again fills the car. He nips from the flask.

EXT SUBURBAN CUL DE SAC - NIGHT

A nicer neighborhood. There’s nowhere for Sutter to park so he decides, fuck it, he’s double parking. Sutter gets out and walks towards the biggest house on the block. There’s a party going on inside. En route to the front door, he plucks a handful of flowers from a neighbor’s garden.

INT HOUSE PARTY - SAME

Flowers in hand, Sutter wanders through the place looking for Cassidy. The house is huge and expensively decorated. Occasional partygoers high-five him on the way but he’s in no mood to be social right now. And then he sees her. Sitting on the couch, playing with the hair of MARCUS WEST (18, tall, lanky, athletic).
SUTTER
Well this is unexpected.

Cass and Marcus turn. Cassidy is surprised to see him.

CASSIDY
What are you doing here?

Knowing he’s lost her, Sutter hides the flowers behind his back.

SUTTER
You got a haircut.

CASSIDY
Yeah I... seemed like a good time for a change.

SUTTER
Goddamn stunning, that haircut.

MARCUS
Are you drunk or something?

SUTTER
Well if drunk equals A, and something equals B, let’s just say the answer is... definitely not B.

Marcus looks at Sutter with a touch of sympathy.

MARCUS
Look man, I know this is awkward. Maybe we should talk outside--

SUTTER
Marcus West! Speaking to me?! What an honor!

CASSIDY
Oh God, Sutter...

MARCUS
Come on man, let’s go out to my car.

SUTTER
Thank you excellency, but that won’t be necessary. I am a fair-minded individual who thoroughly understands the meaning of the phrase ‘kicked to the curb.’

Sutter bows, struggling to keep his balance. Then backs away.

MARCUS
Sutter...
SUTTER
I bid you both a pleasant evening.

Marcus wants to stop Sutter from leaving but Cassidy puts her arm out.

CASSIDY
Let him go. He drives better that way.

SUTTER
(still backing away)
Thanks for the vote of confidence, beautiful! You are the most understanding woman... in everything but love. Arrivederci!

Sutter turns with a flourish and stumbles away.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - AGAIN

Sutter finishes the essay in a flurry.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Unbelievable, isn’t it? You want hardship, misfortune, well there you go.

JUMP CUTS:
- Sutter getting dressed for the evening.
- Sutter drinking some more.

SUTTER (V.O.)
A weaker-minded individual would get depressed. Sit in his room, maybe cry about it. Not this guy. Not Sutter Keely. Don’t count me out just yet, Dean of Admissions. It’s another day, and the night is just getting started. So forget Cassidy, forget exams, forget these pointless college apps. Fuck the past, fuck the future... all that matters is the here and now.

- Sutter looking at himself in the mirror, psyching himself up for the night ahead.

SUTTER (V.O.)
I’m Sutter Keely and I say... it’s time to be alive.

And with that, on Sutter smiling:

Music up: The Walkmen/ “The Rat”
INT SUTTER’S CAR – NIGHT

Music continues over Sutter driving, two hands on the wheel. Drumming a bit to the loud music. Psyching himself up for a good night. (Note: when Sutter is drinking, his world is vibrant, sharp, rich in color. It won’t always be this way.)

EXT DOWNTOWN – OUTSIDE A BAR – LATER

- Sutter gets turned away by a BOUNCER. Pretends it doesn’t bother him.

- Sutter ambles along down the promenade. Takes a nip at his flask. All around him, YOUNG COUPLES stroll past. He tips his imaginary hat at a BUSKER playing acoustic guitar on the street.

- Sutter turned away from another bar. Now getting frustrated. Sees a sign for a bar across the way and the best part -- no bouncer.

INT BAR – LATER

In comes Sutter. The place is crowded. As luck would have it, he spots a table full of COLLEGE GIRLS. Decides to approach.

SUTTER

Ladies... I’m 18 years old and I just got dumped by my girlfriend. Will someone, anyone, please have a drink with me?

A beat. The Girls are delighted to meet him!

- Sutter and the Girls do a round of shots. Then another. They love this kid.

- Sutter dances between two of the Girls. They play with his hair, pinch his cheeks. Innocent fun.

EXT BAR – LATER

Sutter and the Girls are leaving. We quickly realize they’re not leaving together. As they walk away Sutter yells after them.

SUTTER

I love you!

The Girls look back and laugh -- he’s so cute.

SUTTER

I love everyone!

But the Girls keep walking.
INT SUTTER'S CAR - LATER

Cruising - windows down, wind in his face, radio on. Drunk and feeling much better now.

SUTTER
(yelling out the window)
You are holy! You are beautiful! Down with the king! Down with the motherfucking--

SMASHCUT TO BLACK.

HUGE FUCKING TITLE CARD: THE SPECTACULAR NOW

AND THEN DARKNESS. SILENCE. UNTIL:

FEMALE VOICE
Um... hello...

A face.

Or, at least, a head. Female. Completely in shadow from the bright morning sun and thus impossible to make out.

Sutter, who has clearly spent the night passed out on the ground, looks up, disoriented. Puts his hand up to see who it is.

And we see her. Sutter’s age but looking younger. Pale with freckles and glasses. Her hair is strawberry blonde and her eyes the color of a public swimming pool. Her name is AIMEE FINECKY.

AIMEE
You’re alive.

When she talks it’s like she just discovered her voice.

AIMEE
I thought maybe you were dead.

Sutter blinks a few times.

SUTTER
I don’t think I’m dead... Where the hell am I?

AIMEE
You’re in the middle of a yard. Do you know who lives here?

Sutter sits up. Looks at the ugly pink little house.

SUTTER
Jesus, I must have gone to sleep. Hey, where’s my car?
AIMEE
Is it one of those?

Sutter looks at the nearby parked cars. Can’t find his anywhere.

SUTTER
Maybe I parked it at home and just went for a walk.

AIMEE
You don’t live in this neighborhood. Do you, Sutter?

SUTTER
You know my name?

AIMEE
We go to the same school... You wouldn’t remember me.

SUTTER
No... of course I do. You’re um...

AIMEE
Aimee. Aimee Finecky.

SUTTER
Right. Aimee. I was about to say that.
(standing)
What time is it, Aimee?

AIMEE
6am.

SUTTER
Are you coming back from a party or something?

AIMEE
I’m on my paper route.

She motions to the white pickup truck that’s pulled over. We see the back is filled with papers.

AIMEE
It’s really my mom’s paper route but she went to the casino last night with my step-dad. She hasn’t come back yet.

SUTTER
You need some help?

AIMEE
I can manage.

SUTTER
No I’ll help you.
AIMEE
You don’t have to --

SUTTER
Aimee, you’re driving round the neighborhood, I gotta find my car. I’m thinking we can help each other out. Whaddaya say?

Off her look:

INT AIMEE’S CAR - LATER

Aimee drives and Sutter throws papers while looking for his car. It takes a few throws until Sutter gets the hang of it.

SUTTER
I didn’t realize newspaper throwing was such big business. You must reel in some cash.

AIMEE
My mom does.

SUTTER
What, and you get nothing?!

AIMEE
I get an allowance.

SUTTER
An allowance? That doesn’t sound fair. I mean, You do all the work.

AIMEE
Well yeah but... she pays the bills... most of them.

SUTTER
Most of them?! Aimee, she’s your mom! (off her shrug)
Aw man, I don’t know. Sounds to me like a pretty raw deal, this paper route. If I were you, I’d say something.

A sad smile comes over her face. Standing up for herself is the last thing Aimee ever does. Sutter feels bad for her, decides to change the subject. Throwing more papers:

SUTTER
I’m getting the hang of this, aren’t I?

AIMEE
You’re a natural.
SUTTER
Back in Little League, You should have
seen me. I had this booming arm. Here.
Watch this.
   (throws right on target)
Look at that! Are you impressed?

AIMEE
Very.

SUTTER
I had the gift, Aimee. That’s what my Dad
used to say. Probably could have gone pro
if I stuck with it.

AIMEE
So what happened?

SUTTER
Hmm?

AIMEE
Why didn’t you stick with it?

Sutter doesn’t answer.

SUTTER
Hey look! There it is!

Sutter’s Mitsubishi is parked sideways in the middle of a
lawn. Aimee pulls over.

AIMEE
What’s it doing on the lawn?

SUTTER
That is a very good question.

Aimee assumes that now the car has been spotted Sutter
will take off.

AIMEE
Well... thanks again. For helping me.

SUTTER
(motioning to all the papers)
Whaddaya mean? We’re not done yet!

AIMEE
You don’t have to --

SUTTER
Hey it’s the least I can do. Besides, I’m
enjoying myself. Let’s keep going.

The light flips back on in her eyes.
AIMEE
OK!
(beat)
Should you move your car first?

SUTTER
Yes. Good idea.

Sutter jumps out to move his car. Aimee waits. Smiles.

INT AIMEE’S CAR - LATER

Now they’re having fun delivering the papers.

AIMEE
Fire the torpedo, Special Agent Danger!

SUTTER
Aye aye, Captain!

Sutter launches another paper. It lands right on the doorstep.

SUTTER
(explosion sound effect)
Direct shot!

They share a laugh. It’s nice.

- LATER. Paper route over.

SUTTER
We make a good team, don’t we?

AIMEE
You think so?

SUTTER
Absolutely.

Sutter catches the look on Aimee’s face. She’s beaming.

SUTTER
You know what, Aimee Finecky? I had a pretty rotten night last night until you came along. We should get lunch sometime.

AIMEE
How bout Monday?

SUTTER
Oh...k Monday it is. Where should we meet?

AIMEE
The cafeteria?
SUTTER
Why not! We can relive our greatest
triumphs of newspaper delivery!

Aimee smiles at him. It’s nerdy but endearing.

SUTTER
See you Monday, Captain.

With that, he’s off. Feeling pretty good about it too.

INT SUTTER’S HOME - LATER

It’s a modest house, the bottom rung of middle class. In the kitchen Sutter finds his mother, MARY (40s, faded beauty) already up and dressed in her work clothes. She moves in and out of the room as she readies for the long day, barely looking at her son.

MARY
You’re up early.

SUTTER
I uh...

MARY
(not listening)
They have me on a double shift... again.

Sutter heads up to his room.

MARY
(suddenly)
Dammit Sutter.

Sutter stops in his tracks. Uh-oh. Mary comes out of the utility room holding her uniform jacket.

MARY
Didn’t I asked you to hang this for me?
Look how wrinkled this is?

That’s what she’s mad about?

SUTTER
I’m sorry. I forgot.

MARY
It would have taken you two seconds to hang this up and help me. Is that too much to ask?

SUTTER
I’m sorry, I just --

MARY
It’s not like I ask you to do so much around here. Christ.
(MORE)
MARY (CONT'D)
(shakes head; almost to herself)
Sometimes you act just like your father.

Sutter’s face suggests that’s alright with him. Like a tornado, Mary passes through one last time.

MARY
I may not be back in time for dinner. There’s leftovers in the fridge. Or if you want, call your sister --

SUTTER
(hates that idea)
No thanks.

MARY
K, well, I’ve got to go.

Sutter starts to walk off.

MARY
Sutter.

Sutter turns back around.

MARY
Next time I ask you do to something...

Mary doesn’t finish. She just shakes her head. And with that she’s out the door.

SUTTER
(to no one)
I love you too.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - LATER

Sutter lays in his bed, looking up at the baseball pennant. Thinking. Miles Davis plays softly in the background. His alarm goes off but of course he doesn’t need it. He hasn’t slept.

INT RICKY’S CAR - MORNING

Ricky drives Sutter to school. Sutter has his flask and is back to his completely relaxed self.

RICKY
...who knew dinner and a movie would cost more than 30 bucks?

SUTTER
Pretty much anyone who’s ever been on a date.
RICKY
Oh but the best part is... she didn’t care, dude! She paid for the popcorn and everything. She’s just... mmm.

SUTTER
You kiss her?

RICKY
Check.

SUTTER
Tongue action?

RICKY
Double check.

The boys high five. Sutter looks at Ricky and smiles. Likes seeing him happy. Knows he had a hand in it.

RICKY
Wanna go to the Barons game tonight?

SUTTER
Hell yeah.

RICKY
It’s father/son night. We’ll pretend to be brothers.

Hearing this, a look comes over Sutter’s face.

SUTTER
Oh I, uh, actually... shit. I forgot. There’s a... I promised my mom I’d help her with something.

RICKY
You sure?

Sutter nods. Ricky turns back to the road. Sutter looks out the window.

SUTTER
So, uh, where to for lunch today?

RICKY
I thought you were eating with what’s her name.

SUTTER
Oh shit. That’s right.

RICKY
I gotta tell ya Sutter. Aimee Finecky? Strange choice for a rebound.
SUTTER
She’s not a rebound.
(off his look)
She’s not!
(another look)
I have no interest in dating Aimee Finecky.

RICKY
Then what’s the point of lunch?

SUTTER
I think she’s nice, is all. Maybe too nice. Did I tell you bout her paper route? Listen to this. Her mom has her throwing newspapers at 5am, 6 days a week, schooldays and all. She keeps all the money, pays half the bills, and Aimee never says a word about it!

RICKY
That sucks.

SUTTER
It’s bullshit’s what it is.

RICKY
So where do you come in?

SUTTER
I can help her.

RICKY
Oh, here we go. Sutter to the rescue.

SUTTER
She just needs a little confidence is all. Who better than me to bring it out of her?

RICKY
Uh-huh. So... you don’t want to nail her?

SUTTER
Dude, what is wrong with you?

INT CLASSROOM - DAY

MR. ASTER (50s, beard) solves a geometry problem on the chalkboard. The bell rings and students begin to leave.

MR. ASTER
Sutter, can I have a word?

SUTTER
Uh... actually I have to--
MR. ASTER

Have a seat, Mr. Keely.

Sutter really doesn’t want to have a seat but there’s not much he can do about it.

MR. ASTER

Noticed you didn’t turn in the homework.

SUTTER

(suddenly animated)

And I have a really good reason why, Mr. Aster. You’re not even gonna believe it when I --

MR. ASTER

Stop talking.

SUTTER

Yes sir.

MR. ASTER

Sutter, as your teacher, I only want to see you succeed. You know that, don’t you?

SUTTER

Sure I do.

MR. ASTER

And if you fail... that means I fail.

SUTTER

I know, Mr. Aster. And believe me, I will get it together. From here on in.

MR. ASTER

I wanna believe you.

SUTTER

(standing)

Well you should. I’m turning a corner, I promise --

MR. ASTER

Let’s see you answer this.

SUTTER

Sorry?

MR. ASTER

(handing him a sheet)

If one of the acute angles is 2 times as large as the other, what’s the measure of the two angles?

(no idea)

Siddown, I’ll show you.
Sutter is a deer in headlights.

INT HALLWAY - LATER

Sutter emerges from Aster’s class, super late to meet Aimee. He races through the hallway on his way to:

INT LUNCHROOM - SAME

Sutter enters, looking all around for her. Just as he thinks he’s missed her, there she is. Standing alone by the lunch line. Waiting.

SUTTER
I’m so sorry --

AIMEE
You came!

SUTTER
Well of course I did. Why wouldn’t I?

Sutter takes in the scene (only the lamest of the lame eat in the lunchroom).

SUTTER
You actually eat here?

AIMEE
Isn’t that what it’s for?

SUTTER
Well yeah but nobody ever... I mean, I’ve never...
(not wanting to insult)
What’s good, I’m starving?

He gets up to go to the lunch line, gesturing for her to come with.

AIMEE
The tater tots are pretty solid.

- LATER. Sutter and Aimee at the table.

AIMEE
That’s so crazy! How fast were you going?

SUTTER
20, 25 miles per hour.

AIMEE
And you just jumped out of the car?

Aimee is hanging on every word.
There was snow on the ground. I didn’t think it would hurt.

AIMEE
That’s amazing.

SUTTER
Look at you, you’re such a great listener. Ok, now you go.

AIMEE
Um... well, I remember... sophomore year. When you wore that mascot head to gym class and wouldn’t take it off...

SUTTER
Oh yeah.

AIMEE
That was so funny.

SUTTER
Yeah, no, I mean, stories about you.

AIMEE
I don’t have any stories.

SUTTER
Of course you do. Everyone does.

AIMEE
Not me.

SUTTER
Come on. What’s your thing?

AIMEE
My thing?

SUTTER
Yeah, like... what do you love? What do you want to be known for? Larry Rourke’s the stoner. Greg Jacoby’s the rich kid. We all have a thing.

AIMEE
(beat; thinks)
I’d like to think there’s more to people than just one thing. You know?

Sutter smiles, impressed.

AIMEE
Is that ok?

At which point, a supremely uncool girl approaches. This is KRYS...
KRYSTAL
So he finally got here, did he?

AIMEE
Hi Krystal.

SUTTER
(standing like a gentleman)
Krystal, hey, Sutter Keely.

KRYSTAL
I know who you are. Come on Aimee. French Club. They’re waiting for us.

Aimee clearly wants to stay but standing up to people isn’t her thing.

AIMEE
I forgot about the meeting. I’m sorry.

SUTTER
No worries.

As she’s walking away:

SUTTER
Hey Aimee, you ever have Aster for geometry?

AIMEE
Freshmen year.

SUTTER
Probably thought it was easy, huh?

AIMEE
Kind of.

SUTTER
Could you tutor me? I never know what that guy’s talking about.

AIMEE
Uh, sure, anytime.

Aimee writes down her number and hands it to him.

SUTTER
Terrific, thanks. I’ll call you.

Aimee nods, gets up to go, unable to hold back a smile. Krystal gives Sutter one last angry look before walking away. Sutter watches them go. Eats another tater tot.

INT LEWIS FINE MEN’S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

The store has seen better days. Sutter finishes up a sale to a customer.
SUTTER
You’re very welcome. It’s gonna look great on you.

Customer leaves passing the owner, BOB LEWIS (late 30s, kind face) saying goodbye to his WIFE and BABY at the door. Sutter watches them go. Once they’re gone:

SUTTER
Will you please just adopt me already?

BOB
Sorry bud, two’s my limit on mouths to feed. So where were we...

SUTTER
Cassidy.

BOB
Oh right. That’s a shame. I really liked that one.

When Bob is turned around, Sutter pours some whiskey into his soda can. Careful not to let Bob see this.

SUTTER
So did I.

BOB
I kinda thought she’d be the one to yank you out of neutral.

SUTTER
Neutral? What neutral? I’m in overdrive. (off his look)

What?

EXT/INT AIMEE’S HOUSE – AFTERNOON

A small brick cube surrounded by a bare yard. Some shingles are missing from the roof and the original paint color has faded away. Sutter knocks.

CHILD’S VOICE FROM INSIDE
Aimee, your boyfriend’s here.

AIMEE’S VOICE (V.O.)
Shut up Shane. Please.

The door opens. Aimee has put some effort into her looks this afternoon. Most notably, she’s wearing lipstick. He’d never say so but Sutter would rather she wasn’t.

AIMEE
Hi.

SUTTER
Hey there.
AIMEE

Come in.

Sutter follows Aimee inside. We take in the total mess that is Aimee’s living situation. Clothes piled up on the recliner, opened containers covering the tiny coffee table, VHS tapes scattered on the floor. Aimee’s little brother SHANE (11) plays an ancient video game system wearing shorts and no shirt.

AIMEE

This is Shane, my brother.

SUTTER

Hello Shane.

Shane flips Sutter the two-handed bird.

AIMEE

He just learned that.

SUTTER

Charming.

AIMEE

We can study in my room.

SUTTER

Lead the way.

Sutter follows Aimee down the narrow hallway. Notices more mess, some tacky wall hangings. Sutter catches a glimpse of Aimee’s step-dad RANDY, taking a nap in one room (dressed exactly like Shane).

Finally they get to Aimee’s bedroom. Sutter is expecting the worst but when she opens the door, it’s an awesomely neat and colorful place, clearly a sanctuary from the world outside. Sutter is impressed.

SUTTER

Wow, nice.

AIMEE

I like to keep it clean.

Sutter walks around the room, admiring. The back wall is a giant map of the Milky Way. There’s some pencil drawings and ceramic cats scattered about. On one wall is a massive bookshelf covered in notebooks and paperbacks. Welcome to Aimee’s World.

SUTTER

You must really love reading.

AIMEE

They’re mostly science fiction. A few mysteries.

AIMEE
(apologetically)
I know it’s weird.

SUTTER
No that’s cool. Weird is good. I say “embrace the weird.” Why’s it backwards?

AIMEE
That’s how you read them. See?

She shows Sutter how it works. He’s impressed. Notices on the wall one of the pencil drawings -- an anime-style scene of a woman flying through space.

SUTTER
Is this you flying through space?

AIMEE
No, it’s, um... it’s nothing. Just this thing I like.

SUTTER
Who is she?

Aimee is embarrassed... but Sutter silently encourages her to answer.

AIMEE
She’s... Shirei Migoto. From the Bright Planet books. Stupid, I know.

SUTTER
If you like it, it’s not stupid. What makes her so special?

AIMEE
She’s the leader of the Neexo Ark. It’s up to her to escape the Dark Galaxy and find the Bright Planet star system.

SUTTER
(looking at another drawing)
I... see...

There’s drawings of the Commander everywhere.

AIMEE
 stil shyly)
She’s kind of my hero... and stuff.

Sutter feels exceedingly bad for this girl right now.
SUTTER
You know what? You'll be my hero if you can straighten me out on this geometry business.

AIMEE
Sure.

They sit down and get situated. Sutter opens the big textbook.

SUTTER
So... quadrilaterals. Talk to me.

AIMEE
How much of this have you read?

Sutter looks up. Smiles. He hasn’t read a word of course.

- LATER. They’ve been at it a while.

AIMEE
So, in this figure, angle 2 and angle 4 are...
(Sutter has no clue)
Complementary angles.

SUTTER
Complementary. Got it. Man, you’re a wonderful teacher, Miss Finecky.

AIMEE
So then, you understand?

SUTTER
Well... here’s what I don’t understand. When on earth will I ever need to know this stuff?

AIMEE
Um...

SUTTER

Aimee laughs. And then:

VOICE (O.S.)
Aimee! Come out here right now, will you!

The craggy voice belongs to Randy. Hearing it saps the fun vibe of the room almost immediately.

AIMEE
My step-dad.
SUTTER

That’s ok.

RANDY’S VOICE (O.S.)

We’re all out of milk, Aimee. I thought you were going to get some.

AIMEE

I will!

RANDY’S VOICE (O.S.)

Do it now, crissakes. The hell has she been doing all afternoon?

It’s quiet for a beat.

AIMEE

I should really...

Aimee smiles her sad smile, starts putting on her shoes.

SUTTER

Yeah, sure. No problem.

The expression on her face is like her ship just crashed back to Earth. Sutter feels terrible.

SUTTER

You know what, there’s this party on Saturday. I think you should go with me.

AIMEE

Me?

SUTTER

Yeah you. I’ll come by and grab you around 8:30. What do you say?

AIMEE

Um... ok?

SUTTER

Is that an answer or a question?

AIMEE

No, I mean, yeah, yes. I’d like that.

EXT STRIP MALL - 7/11 - LATER

Sutter comes out of the convenience store with his Big Gulp. On the way to his car, he passes a comic book store. Sutter walks right by before stopping and turning around.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sutter finishes mixing a drink, turns on Thelonious Monk’s “Straight, No Chaser”, and sits down at his desk.
We see a stack of Manga books which Sutter bought at the store. He puts his feet up and begins to read through one in reverse.

INSERT: elegantly drawn images from the books, the occasional caption about dreams, freedom, the future.

Sutter finds himself surprisingly captivated.

We hear the chime of an Instant Message. Sutter looks up from the book to his computer. He’s got a message from “CASSIDY210.” (Her icon is a seductive personal pic). The message just says “Hey.”

Sutter perks up. This is a nice, new development. He writes back... Sutter&7: “Hey.” (His icon: Sinatra). Takes a swig.

Her message: “How are you?” Sutter drinks some more. Writes back: “Fabuloso.” Then it’s quiet for a few beats. Sutter scratches his head, thinking of the right thing to say.

But then he gets this: “I miss you.” Sutter’s eyes open wide. Writes back: “Will I see you tomorrow?” And then “Alisa’s party.” Her message: “Think so.” Then, as Sutter is writing back, she sends: “Gotta go. Talk soon.” And signs off. Sutter returns his attention to the Manga but his mind is now very much elsewhere.

EXT LAKE SIDE HIGH SCHOOL PARTY - NIGHT

A bonfire. Picnic tables. Kegs. Music. Twenty or so high school kids already in the swing of things. Sutter and Aimee approach the party. Aimee wears an oversized purple winter coat that makes her look rotund. Sutter badly wants her to take it off.

SUTTER
You sure you don’t want me to carry your coat?

AIMEE
It’s kinda chilly out.

Oh well, he tried. As they walk towards the keg, pretty much everyone they pass says “Hi” to Sutter or slaps him five. He’s the king of these high school parties.

SUTTER
See anyone you know?

AIMEE
I don’t really know a lot of people.

SUTTER
Well that, my dear, is about to change.
At the keg, Sutter is saluted by some classmates.

SUTTER
How bout a brew?

AIMEE
Um, I don’t... really...

SUTTER
Don’t drink it, just hold it. Gives off the illusion you’re having fun.

JASON DOYLE
Now it’s a party!

This is JASON DOYLE (collar up, smarmy as hell). Sutter has no love for this dude.

JASON DOYLE
Whatup Sutterman? You gonna dive in the lake again tonight?

SUTTER
We’ll see.

JASON DOYLE
You’re crazy dude.
(eyeing Aimee)
And who might I ask is this?

AIMEE
Aimee.

Jason and Aimee shake hands. Jason is either going to hit on her or poke fun at her. Sutter doesn’t care to find out which.

SUTTER
Doyle, what are you doing talking to us? Shouldn’t you be going for Alisa Norman now that she’s single?

JASON DOYLE
Alisa Norman? Since when?

SUTTER
Couple days.

JASON DOYLE
You shitting me?

SUTTER
I am shitting you not.

Jason, intrigued, hurries off to find Alisa.
SUTTER
(to Aimee)
I am shitting him big time.

AIMEE
(realizes)
You’re gonna get that guy killed!

SUTTER
Yeah I feel real bad about it.


SUTTER
You get used to it.

Meanwhile, Sutter’s eyes land on a small, preppy kid with a baseball cap. He stands by a picnic table alone with his hands in his pockets.

SUTTER
Come with me.

Sutter walks Aimee over to the kid, CODY DENNIS.

SUTTER
Cody, my man.

CODY
Hey Sutter.

SUTTER
You guys know each other? This is Aimee.

They exchange sheepish “hellos.”

SUTTER
Cody’s a sophomore but he’s in all my classes. Aimee here’s a genius too.

That doesn’t get them talking very much either. Hmm...

SUTTER
You’re a reader, aren’t you Cody? You ever read the Bright Planet books?

CODY
(cautiously)
One or two.

SUTTER
(to Aimee)
I forgot to tell you. I started the first one last night.

AIMEE
You did?
SUTTER
It’s really cool. I like the part where Shirei Migoto takes on the Galactic Warlord. She fucks that guy up!

AIMEE
I know, right?!

SUTTER
And all that stuff about “inner prosperity.” Happiness from within. That’s my shit.

AIMEE
You should read the second one. It’s so awesome.

CODY
I love those books.

SUTTER
(of course he does)
Do you?

As Cody tries to get back into the convo, Sutter sees Cassidy appear. Her beauty makes him wince. Meanwhile:

CODY
Have you read “Solar Bull?”

AIMEE
Oh my god, I love Solar Bull!

SUTTER
Haven’t read that one yet.

Cody and Aimee start enthusiastically chatting about it.

SUTTER
You know what. You guys discuss. I’ll be back in like, two seconds. Ok?

Aimee and Cody don’t mind. Sutter starts to walk towards Cassidy. On the way, however, he turns back to make sure Aimee is ok. Seeing she’s fine, Sutter makes his way over to Cassidy. She waves. He waves back -- only to discover it wasn’t him she was waving to. It was Marcus. They hug tightly. This stings.

Sutter quickly ducks in the direction of the keg. TWO CLASSMATES are playing Beirut.

CLASSMATE #1
... I was so pumped when I got in.

CLASSMATE #2
Yeah no shit.
CLASSMATE #1
I can’t wait to get out of here.

CLASSMATE #2
Fucking five more months.
(see Sutter)
Hey Sutter.

SUTTER
What’s up guys?

Sutter refills his cup, keeping one eye on Cass and Marcus.

CLASSMATE #1
Mike’s here if you wanna surf on his car again.

SUTTER
Maybe later.

Sutter downs one drink, pours two more, carries them over to Cassidy.

SUTTER
Hello gang.

MARCUS
Sutter.

SUTTER
(to Cass)
Who could use a drink?

CASSIDY
(as expected)
Sure.

Sutter notices that the crew around Cass and Marcus seem to be waiting for some kind of incident. Well he’s not going to give them one.

SUTTER
Everyone’s so serious tonight.
(beat)
How bout a joke? What do you call a fish with no eye?

They all wait for it.

SUTTER
A fsshh.

It takes a second but eventually Cass starts to laugh. The others join in.
SUTTER
Heard that from an 8 year old running
away from home. Want another? Where would
you find a dog with no legs...? Right
where you left him.

Even Marcus finds this one funny. Denver, the athlete,
approaches.

DENVER
What are you guys laughing at?

CASSIDY
Sutter.

DENVER
I should have guessed.

SUTTER
I know. I’m hilarious.

DENVER
Anyone see Alisa?

SUTTER
Did you two break up or something?

DENVER
No. Why’d you say that?

SUTTER
Sorry. I thought I saw her with Jason Doyle.

DENVER
What the fuck--!

Denver turns to go find Jason and kick his ass.

MARCUS
Denver, slow down!

But he’s off. Jason Doyle is in trouble.

MARCUS
(to Cass)
I’ll be right back.

The other guys go with them, leaving Cass and Sutter
alone. Sutter has a canary eating smile on his face.

CASSIDY
What did you do?

SUTTER
(winks)
Me? Nothing.
LATER. Sutter and Cassidy are catching up by the keg.

CASSIDY
So Ricky and Beth are officially together?

SUTTER
I wonder how that happened.

CASSIDY
You really weren’t going for Tara that night?

SUTTER
Are you nuts?
(holds hands out like scales)
Over here I have cute little Tara. Nice girl. Good skin. Attractive. But over here, I have spanktacularly perfect you. Who do you think I would choose?

Cassidy blushes, causing Sutter to smile.

CASSIDY
Don’t give me that smile.

SUTTER
I’m sorry. I can’t help myself.

At which point a shout rises up on the other side of the crowd. Catcalls of “Fight! Fight!” are audible.

SUTTER
Guess they found Doyle.

Sutter and Cass move to get a closer look. Denver is on top of someone, pushing him into the ground. Marcus is trying to hold him back. Cass runs to Marcus’s aid, leaving Sutter alone.

But when Sutter is able to see the kid being beaten, it isn’t Jason at all. That’s weird. Confused, he looks around for Jason and finally sees him away from the crowd, standing against a tree -- talking with Aimee.

SUTTER
Fuck.

Sutter makes haste over to Aimee, noticing that she looks ready to hurl at any moment.

SUTTER
What’s going on here? Where’s Cody?

JASON DOYLE
Couldn’t handle the competition.
SUTTER
(to Aimee)
You all right?

AIMEE
Um, yeah, I'm just, you know, not used to drinking.

SUTTER
Let's go for a walk.

Sutter grabs Aimee and helps her up.

JASON DOYLE
Hey, man, what the --

SUTTER
Get lost douchebag.

Sutter takes Aimee by the arm and walks her in another direction. As he does, he catches Cassidy watching him with Aimee.

LATER. They walk on a dirt road, far away from the rest of the revelers.

SUTTER
You sure you're alright?

AIMEE
Thank you. I'm a little... you know.

SUTTER
You like it?

AIMEE
It's good. It's... different.

SUTTER
Hey, I'm sorry about Doyle. He's a dick. I hope he didn't --

AIMEE
No, we were just... we were just talking.

SUTTER
Wow. You're hammered, aren't you?

Aimee leans up against Sutter. Their shoulders touching. She looks at him and smiles. Sutter isn't sure what to do so he takes a nip from the flask.

AIMEE
Can I try that?

SUTTER
This? No. This is some serious stuff.
AIMEE

Just a taste.

Sutter hesitates but then hands it to her. She takes more than a sip and is immediately coughing and choking.

AIMEE

How can you drink this?

SUTTER

I’ve been at it a while. You know who gave me my first beer?

AIMEE

Who?

SUTTER

My father. I was probably... 6. We used to go to baseball games every Saturday and he would let me take little sips.

AIMEE

Did you get drunk?

SUTTER

Nah. But it sure felt nice and warm...

He smiles at this memory.

AIMEE

Where is he now... your father?

SUTTER

He’s an airline pilot. Flies all over the country.

AIMEE

That’s so cool!

SUTTER

He’s a cool guy. The best. I don’t know what he was doing with my mom that whole time.

AIMEE

They’re divorced?

SUTTER

Oh yeah. She threw him out of the house a long time ago. (beat) But it’s fine. Believe me, he’s way better off now.

Aimee takes another sip. Winces but doesn’t choke.

AIMEE

Sounds like we have the same mother.
SUTTER

How’s that?

AIMEE

Well for example... I got into college today and there’s no way my mom will let me go.

SUTTER

(beat)
You got into college today?

AIMEE

Uh-huh.

SUTTER

No shit!

AIMEE

In St. Louis. Where my sister lives.

SUTTER

That’s, I don’t know what to say, Aim. Congratulations!

AIMEE

It doesn’t matter, though... cause my mom --

SUTTER

Hold on. What’s your mom have to do with it?

AIMEE

She needs me. There’s no one else to help with the route.

SUTTER

(disbelief)
Aimee, seriously. Your mom will be fine. She’s a grown woman. You have to go to St. Louis.

AIMEE

Yeah but --

SUTTER

No. No buts. Don’t you see? You’re like this extraordinary genius chick but you’ve got all these people making you do stuff. It’s gotta stop.

AIMEE

How?

SUTTER

It’s your life! Stand up for yourself.
AIMEE
It’s not that easy.

SUTTER
I’ll teach you. Here... have another swig.

Aimee takes the flask. Drinks another sip.

SUTTER
Now repeat after me. “Mom, get off my motherfucking back!”

AIMIEE
What?!

SUTTER
Say it.

AIMIEE
No!

(beat; quietly)
Get off my back.

SUTTER
Dude, you’ve got to say it like you mean it. And the motherfuck is key. Trust me.
“Mom...”

AIMIEE
“Mom...”

SUTTER
“Get off my MOTHERFUCKING back, Mom!”

AIMIEE
(beat)
“Get off my... fucking... back, Mom!”

SUTTER
Motherfucking.

AIMIEE
Motherfucking back! Motherfucker! Aaaah!

SUTTER
Yes!

AIMIEE
That sorta feels good.

SUTTER
I told you.

AIMIEE
Get off my motherfucking back, mom. Stay out of my motherfucking business, Krystal.
SUTTER
Oh! Krystal got one. Who else?

AIMEE
I think that’s it.

SUTTER
How bout an ex-boyfriend? Fuck you ex-boyfriend!

Aimee clamps up. Sutter notices.

SUTTER
Come on. You can’t be 17 and not have one
horrible ex-boyfriend you want to curse
out.

(she doesn’t)
Nobody?

AIMEE
It’s not... guys don’t really look at
me... like that. You know?

SUTTER
You’re crazy. Didn’t you see Jason Doyle
hitting on you? And Cody Dennis?

AIMEE
They weren’t hitting on me.

SUTTER
Of course they were. You’re a sweetheart.
I mean, look at you.

Aimee is not at all convinced. To convince her, Sutter
takes hold of her chin, tilts it up, and plants a kiss on
her. When it’s over:

AIMEE
Whew.

SUTTER
You’re damn right “whew.”

Sutter smiles. Aimee smiles back. So Sutter goes in for
another one. Why the hell not? And as they kiss, CUT TO:

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Sutter’s asleep in his clothes from the night before.
Food wrappers and a stray beer can are littered around
the bed. The clock reads: 12:06pm. Sutter stirs. Moans.
The hangover is upon him.
INT BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sutter showers. He leans against the wall, head in his arms as the water falls on him. He tries to remember the night before.

- FLASH: Sutter and Aimee walk away from the party. Cassidy watching.

BACK TO Sutter in the shower. Remembering.

- FLASH: Sutter kissing Aimee, like we saw.

BACK TO Sutter in the shower. Ok, yeah, that happened.

- FLASH: Sutter helping Aimee to get to her front door.

SUTTER
Of course you’re going to the prom. I’ll take you.

BACK TO Sutter in the shower. Can’t believe he said that. Rolls back his head in disgust.

INT RICKY’S HOUSE - LATER

Sutter and Ricky watch a baseball game on TV. Sutter fixes himself a drink.

RICKY
You made plans with her? Like, future plans?

SUTTER
It’s no big deal.

RICKY
It’s you making plans. You never make plans.

SUTTER
Relax, will you? I’m just trying to help the girl.

RICKY
Right I forgot. Sutter to the rescue.

SUTTER
Exactly.

RICKY
And if she falls for you, what happens then?

Sutter dismisses this as nonsense. Ricky holds his gaze.
INT SUTTER’S HOUSE - LATER

Sutter comes in. Walks into the kitchen. Puts down his stuff. There’s a message on the answering machine. He presses play and hears:

AIMEE’S VOICE
Sutter, hi, it’s, um, it’s Aimee. Wasn’t sure if we were studying tonight. Call me. If you want.

Sutter barely reacts to the message. As he listens, he goes to the fridge. Reads a note from Mom, something about working late and chicken in the microwave. Sutter doesn’t react to that either. Whistling, he bypasses the food and goes straight to the liquor cabinet.

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - LATER

Sutter sits in front of his computer, stirring a drink. He looks at the application essay he has written (“Describe a hardship...”) Sutter highlights the essay (from our opening) and deletes the whole thing. He takes a deep breath. Is about to start over when he hears a sound.

ON SCREEN we see “CASSIDY210 is now online”.

Sutter opens the chat window. We see “Sutter&7” send her a message: “Hey, beautiful.” Sutter waits for a response. Gets one: “Hello you...” Sutter thinks about what to say next. Writes: “What are you doing? Let’s hang out.” Sutter debates sending that. One beat. Two beats. Wills himself to hit send.

No response. Now he’s nervous. Then it comes: “I’m heading out to the mall.” Sutter sits back in his chair. About to give up. And then he receives: “Wanna come?”

INT MALL - LATER

They pass Sutter’s flask back and forth as they walk, reminiscing.

CASSIDY
...and the time under the bleachers. Who could ever forget that?

SUTTER
Remember the lightning storm?

CASSIDY
On your roof! That was amazing!

SUTTER
You’re telling me.
CASSIDY
(beat; reflective)
I don’t know how many times I’ve ever felt like that.

SUTTER
Not a lot.

CASSIDY
But every time was with you.

SUTTER
I think I feel it right now.

Cassidy smiles and walks on.

CASSIDY
Stop it.

SUTTER
It’s true. When we’re together, it’s like, we’re invincible. Like nothing can touch us, like everything else in the world - the problems, the responsibilities - they all just disappear.

Sutter looks right in her eyes. Cassidy looks down.

CASSIDY
I don’t want to lose you Sutter.

Sutter tenderly touches her cheek.

SUTTER
Then you won’t.

She looks back up at him. Deciding.

INT CASSIDY’S BEDROOM - LATER

And now they’re making out on Cassidy’s bed. Clothes are coming off. Every time Sutter tries to say something, she bites his lip.

SUTTER
God you’re beautiful.

CASSIDY
Don’t talk.

Cassidy lies down. They continue kissing. Sutter moves to her neck. Suddenly her hands stop moving and her body freezes. Sutter is confused.

SUTTER
What’s wrong?
CASSIDY

SUTTER
What do you mean, ‘just go ahead’?

CASSIDY
Just do it.

She lies perfectly still with her eyes closed.

SUTTER
I can’t... I’m not gonna just do it. What’s wrong with you?

Sutter pulls away.

SUTTER
Are you thinking about Marcus?
(she says nothing)
Are you in love with him?

CASSIDY
I don’t want to talk about him right now.

SUTTER
It’s just a yes or no thing. I’m not asking for a whole essay.

CASSIDY
I don’t know... Maybe.
(starts to cry)
I’m, like, really confused right now.

SUTTER
What about us? This afternoon?

CASSIDY
That’s what got me so confused. Today has been... great.

SUTTER
But?

CASSIDY
We always have fun. I mean, I don’t have fun with anyone like I do with you.

SUTTER
I agree --

CASSIDY
But you can’t go around having fun all the time. Sometimes you have to be serious.

SUTTER
I am serious. I’m 100 percent serious.
CASSIDY
About what?

SUTTER
About... not being serious. Enjoying things. Living in the moment.

CASSIDY
I want more than just... “moments.” I want --

What?

SUTTER
A future.

CASSIDY
Are you mad?

SUTTER
I’m not mad. Whatever. You and I... friends. That’s terrific.

Music up: a girl singing a contemporary folk song on acoustic guitar. CUT TO:

INT MOTEL ROOM - LATER

On Sutter’s utterly distraught face, we PULL BACK TO REVEAL he is at a birthday party, where all the kids are drinking pop and watching a pig-tailed GIRL play a song about Jesus on the guitar.

He looks at Ricky who sits on the couch holding hands with Beth. They actually seem to be enjoying this. Sutter can’t take it anymore. Gets up and walks out.

INT MOTEL - DOWNSTAIRS

Sutter walks down the stairs, wanders through the atrium.

VOICE (O.S.)
Yo, Carmine!

Sutter turns. It’s SHAWNIE BROWN (18, brunette, funky glasses, hip), on her way inside.

SUTTER
Ay Carmine, how you doin’?

SHAWNIE
I’m doin’ bravissimo, Carmine. Whatchoo doin’?
SUTTER
Just tryin’ to put some distance between me and dem stiffs upstairs at dat lame-ass party.

SHAWNIE
Ay-oh, I was just goin’ to that. No good?

SUTTER
Fuggettaboudit.

SHAWNIE
No, you fuggettaboudit.

SUTTER
Aaaay, you’re breakin’ my balls.

They both burst out laughing and hug.

SHAWNIE
So, really, the party’s lame?

SUTTER
Whatever you do Shawnie, do not go in there.

SHAWNIE
Shit. There’s, like, nothing else going on tonight.

SUTTER
(holding up his flask)
There’s always something going on when I’m around.

INT MOTEL GAME ROOM - LATER

A couple of old arcade games in the corner and a beat up ping pong table. They talk while playing ping pong.

SHAWNIE
Why didn’t you tell me that before I started dating him?

SUTTER
Would it have made a difference?

SHAWNIE
Probably not... Point game.
(she serves)
What about you?

SUTTER
What about me?

SHAWNIE
What’s up with you and Cassidy?
SUTTER
Cassidy who?

SHAWNIE
(not buying it)
Uh-huh.

SUTTER
The past is past, Shawnie Brown. You know me. I live in the now.

She smashes a shot past Sutter.

SHAWNIE
Woo! Three games in a row, sucker.

SUTTER
Ping pong’s not my game.

Clearly.

SUTTER
(eyes a hot tub in the next room)
Now that’s what I need.

Sutter races to it, Shawnie follows. He feels the water.

SHAWNIE
You’re not really going in there, are you?

SUTTER
Of course I am.

SHAWNIE
Bullshit.

Sutter steps into the hot tub, fully dressed. He eases himself down into the tub.

SHAWNIE
You’re crazy.

SUTTER
Yeah but that’s why you like me so much.
So, Miss Queen of Ping Pong, your move...

SHAWNIE
You can never outdo me, Sutter.

Shawnie follows him in, her white t-shirt clinging to her body, showing all. Sutter’s mouth drops and Shawnee smiles at him, knowing she’s won.

For a beat they sit there together. And then, almost without thinking, Sutter kisses her.
It works -- for about a second before Shawnie starts giggling. Then it's a full-blown laugh. Sutter can't help but to laugh too. It's contagious.

SHAWNIE
You know what, Sutter? You're my favorite ex-boyfriend of all time. I'm sure going to miss you next year.

SUTTER
Why, where you going?

SHAWNIE
College. (beat)
Aren't you?

SUTTER
Haven't really thought about it.

SHAWNIE
Yeah, right. (beat)
Wait, you're serious?

Sutter shrugs. Shawnie splashes him in disbelief.

SHAWNIE
You're not going to college?

SUTTER
What for?

SHAWNIE
Sutter!

SUTTER
What?

SHAWNIE
It's fucking college!

SUTTER
My Dad never went to college and now he's, like, the number two real estate developer in Cook County. Who needs it? I have everything I need right here. A job. A car... A naked girl in a hot tub.

Shawnie laughs. Sutter smiles at her.

SUTTER
SHAWNIE
You’re drunk.

SUTTER
Yeah but I’m not wrong.

Shawnie thinks about it. Not completely wrong anyway.

SHAWNIE
Ay, you’re breakin’ my balls here.

SUTTER
You’re breakin’ my balls!

They engage in a friendly splash fight as we TRACK AWAY.

CUT TO:

INT SUTTER’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sutter comes in and sits at his computer. Again opens the college application window. The essay is now totally blank. He looks at the question. Quick glance to the pennant on the wall. Sutter takes a swig from the flask. Says out loud:

SUTTER
Fuck this.

And turns off the computer.

INT HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Crowded with kids heading in all directions. And then there’s Sutter. He strolls down the hall until he spots Aimee at a distance. Her back is turned. Sutter quickly turns down another hallway.

EXT SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER

Sutter is walking to his Lancer when:

VOICE
Just who do you think you are?

It’s Krystal Krittenbrink, and she doesn’t look happy.

SUTTER
The King of Mexico?

KRYSALT
Don’t think you’re going to joke your way out of this, Sutter. Aimee told me about your little party out by the lake.

SUTTER
And?
KRYSTAL
And now you’re avoiding her.

SUTTER
I’m not avoiding anyone.

KRYSTAL
Really? Have you seen her since the party? Have you even called?

SUTTER
How bout you get off my back?

KRYSTAL
Ha, I knew Aimee got that from you. She said the same thing.

SUTTER
Did she? Good for her.

KRYSTAL
No, it’s not good for her. Aimee’s isn’t like you, Sutter. She’s a sweet girl. She doesn’t need you causing problems in her life.

SUTTER
(walking away)
The only problem Aimee has is you bossing her around like she’s your personal assistant.

KRYSTAL
(yelling after him)
You shouldn’t treat her this way.

SUTTER
(not stopping)
Whatever buzzkill.

INT SUTTER’S CAR - LATER
Sutter drives around. Takes a drink from the Big Gulp. We can tell he’s thinking about what Krystal said. Rolls his eyes and makes a U-Turn.

EXT AIMEE’S HOUSE - DUSK
Sutter knocks. It takes a few moments for the door to open. It’s Shane. Before Sutter can say anything Shane turns his head.

SHANE
Aimee! Your boyfriend’s back!

AIMEE (O.S.)
What? Oh, um, tell him to hold on a second, I’ll be right there.
SHANE
(running off)
You tell him!

SUTTER
(to no one)
Bye Shane.

Sutter waits in the doorway. Drinks. After a few moments
Aimee appears. She’s wearing what looks like a new shirt
and her hair is all staticky from a quick brushing.

AIMEE
I didn’t know you were coming over today.

SUTTER
Yeah, no, I wasn’t, but uh... I was
driving around and I thought, ‘I don’t
care how busy I am. I want to see how
Aimee’s doing.’
(off her smile)
So... how you doing?

AIMEE
Good.

SUTTER
Good. Great. Listen, my sister is having
a dinner for her swanky friends and I’m
being forced to show --

AIMEE
You have a sister? I didn’t know that.

SUTTER
Yeah, well, we’re not really close.
Anyway, would you wanna come with me?

AIMEE
Um... ok! When is it?

SUTTER
Ten minutes.

AIMEE
Oh. Uh... Sure! I’ll go get my coat.

SUTTER
Let’s leave the coat.

INT HOLLY’S DINING ROOM - LATER

ANGLE on HOLLY, Sutter’s sister, (25, heavily made up,
dyed blonde hair, fake breasts and dressed to show them,
jewelry glistening everywhere).
HOLLY
...and I said “could I get you boys anything else?” And he said, tell ‘em what you said honey.

Holly’s husband JOE (early 40s, confident without cause) sits to her right.

JOE
I leaned back in my chair, puffed out my chest and I said... “You could give me your number gorgeous?”

The PARTY GUESTS (mostly OLDER MEN and their YOUNGER SECOND WIVES) like this. Sutter, at the other end of the long table, makes the “vomit” face to Aimee. She laughs.

HOLLY
I had no idea he was a big fancy lawyer but I gave it to him anyway. And I’m sure glad I did!

JOE
Hasn’t worked a day in her life since.

Joe squeezes her leg. Holly pecks her husband on the lips. Aimee rolls her eyes at this. Signals for another top-off from the flask which Sutter provides out of view from the others.

HOLLY
Isn’t that a great story?

SUTTER
Wow. You guys sure are a breath of fresh air.

HOLLY
Thank you Sutter.

SUTTER
It’s rare to see such happy couples nowadays. Seems like everyone’s divorced.

HOLLY
That’s not true.

SUTTER
Isn’t it? My parents, (to Aimee) your parents, most of my friend’s parents --

JOE
Kid’s got a point.

SUTTER
Thank you Joe.
AIMEE
Mine didn’t.

SUTTER
(confused)
They didn’t? But I thought...

Aimee shakes her head no.

HOLLY
See Sutter. Not everything is doomed.

AIMEE
My Dad died.

That sucks the air out of the room.

HOLLY
I’m so sorry.

AIMEE
Not your fault.

Aimee takes a drink. The guests shuffle in their seats.

HOLLY
Oh honey, what happened?

AIMEE
He was a great guy. He just… he had a… problem. Painkillers, mostly.

No one really knows what to say.

AIMEE
He tried to stop a bunch of times, but… One day my sister came home and he was just lying there. She had to close his eyes.

JOE
Jesus.

She takes another sip of her drink but this time doesn’t flinch.

AIMEE
(to Sutter)
Anyway, I don’t agree with you. About marriage. Mine’s gonna totally work.

SUTTER
Oh yeah?

AIMEE
I’ve thought it all out. We’re going to live on a horse ranch, my husband and I. I’ll work for NASA. And my husband…

(MORE)
AIMEE (CONT'D)
he’ll do something completely different. And we’ll offset each other. Like we’ll have some things in common but we’ll also have all these other dimensions that we bring to the relationship. And that’s how I know it’ll work.

Sutter is taken aback. Really impressed with her now.

JOE
(dismissive)
Sounds like a dream.

AIMEE
(right back at him)
It’s good to have dreams. Don’t you think?

Aimee looks at Sutter, smiles. Sutter, still stunned, smiles back. Raises his glass.

SUTTER
To dreams.

EXT WATER TOWER - NIGHT
Where kids hang out cause there’s nowhere to go. Away from the party, Sutter and Aimee share a drink sitting on the roof of his car.

AIMEE
Did you mean what you said at the party?

SUTTER
Uh... which... thing --?

AIMEE
When you asked me to the Prom?

SUTTER
(beat)
Well of course I remember that. Are you kidding? I wouldn’t forget something like that.

There’s an awkward pause.

AIMEE
Do you still want to go? I mean, if you don’t, I’ll understand.

SUTTER
What are you talking about? I totally want to go. I wouldn’t have asked you if I didn’t.

AIMEE
Really?
SUTTER

Sure. Can’t wait.

She looks at him and smiles. He smiles back. Starting to really like how happy he makes this girl.

SUTTER

(shutting off radio)

Come here.

They start to kiss. Sutter then stops. Takes off her glasses. Sets them on the hood. Kissing resumes. This lasts a few seconds before someone whistles at them from the water tower. Aimee and Sutter laugh.

SUTTER

Come on. I’ll take you home.

INT HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

In the hallway, Aimee kisses Sutter goodbye. Holds on to his arm for as long as she can as they part. Sutter goes one way, she goes the other. Ricky joins Sutter with a disapproving look.

SUTTER

It’s under control.

(Ricky shakes his head)

Hey, did it ever cross your mind that I might actually be attracted to her?

RICKY

No.

SUTTER

That’s cause you haven’t really looked at her. I’m telling you. You have to talk to her a while before you can really see her.

Ricky’s expression doesn’t change.

SUTTER

What am I doing that’s so wrong? Really? Worst case scenario, I’m giving her some much needed boyfriend experience.

RICKY

That’s worst case scenario?

SUTTER

Totally.

(Ricky still shakes his head)

You and I both know, another month tops before she’s done with me and moves on.

RICKY

And what if she doesn’t?
SUTTER
Well then that would be a first, wouldn’t it?

Fair point. Jason Doyle walks over.

JASON DOYLE
Hey Sutter, Marcus was looking for you.

SUTTER
Marcus? What for?

JASON DOYLE
I’ll let him tell you that.

Jason walks away, smiling maliciously. Sutter and Ricky look at one another, knowing that can’t be good.

INT LEWIS’S FINE MEN’S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Sutter is shadowboxing while talking to Bob at the men’s shop.

SUTTER
...and he’s like yay big and I’m like yay big... so that’s bad. Plus, he’s fast. And his reach has got to be way out --

BOB
Sutter, what are you doing? You’re not a fighter.

SUTTER
Tell me about it!

BOB
So why’s he want to fight you?

SUTTER
I don’t know. He must think I’m still after Cassidy.

BOB
Is he right?

Sutter stops boxing (clearly winded). Takes a drink from his Big Gulp.

SUTTER
No. I mean -- we talk, a little. Online mostly.

(off his look)
Hey, I’m the victim here. She chose him.

(beat)
Just cause I want to keep in touch with my ex doesn’t make me a bad guy. Does it?
BOB
You’re not a bad guy, Sutter. You just
don’t have a real good grasp of the idea
of consequences.

LATER. Sutter turns off the lights. Goes outside, locking
the door behind him. Big Gulp in hand. As he walks to his
car:

VOICE
We need to talk.

Oh shit, it’s Marcus. Here we go.

SUTTER
Ok sure. Long as it’s quick --

MARCUS
What’s up with you and Cassidy?

SUTTER
Nothing’s up. Why, what have you heard?

Marcus just stares Sutter down. Intimidating.

SUTTER
Look, man, I don’t want any trouble.

MARCUS
Tell me the truth.

Marcus gets right up in Sutter’s face. Sutter knows if
this gets physical, he’s not gonna win.

SUTTER
We’re just friends. Honestly. She’s moved
on. I’ve moved on...

MARCUS
You’ve moved on?

SUTTER
(Not convincingly)
I have.

MARCUS
Everyone knows you’d drop Aimee Finecky
in a second if Cass would go back to you.

SUTTER
Everyone knows that? Well guess what...
everyone’s wrong.

(beat)
Look, Marcus, trust me, ok. We hang out
sometimes, we have fun, but I promise
you, nothing’s going on between Cass and
me.
Marcus continues to stare Sutter down. A beat. And then it’s Marcus who breaks the stare first. He looks down at his feet. Sutter realizes something — he isn’t angry, he’s distressed.

    MARCUS
    (beat)
    Can I ask you something?

    SUTTER
    Oh...k.

    MARCUS
    Why can’t it be me she has fun with?

    SUTTER
    (beat; not expecting that)
    What?

    MARCUS
    I’m not like you, Sutter. I don’t know how to make her laugh and stuff. I want to, I just... I don’t know what to do. Can you help me?

The direction of this conversation has thrown Sutter for a loop.

    SUTTER
    Dude... you’re Marcus West. Star athlete. Class President. What’s that charity you started?

    MARCUS
    The Hope Brigade.

    SUTTER
    The Hope Brigade, for fuck’s sake. You’re the man, Marcus! You don’t need my help.

    MARCUS
    The way she talks about you... it’s not the same, man. I want her to like me like that. And she doesn’t. I know she doesn’t.

Sutter is stunned to see Marcus so distraught and vulnerable. This is too weird.

    SUTTER
    Look, Marcus, you don’t want to be like me. Trust me. I make jokes and stuff but you... you get shit done. You’re gonna change the world. You guys are perfect together.

Marcus’s mood is slowly improving. Sutter is on a roll.
SUTTER
You just need to loosen up a bit. You’re too tense.

MARCUS
Maybe.

SUTTER
All that charity work you do. Volunteering. It’s nice but, I mean come on, you’re young. Not everything has to be serious all the time. See a movie. Maybe have a beer once in a while.

MARCUS
That’s not for me, man.

SUTTER
I’m just saying... relax. Enjoy yourself, you know? Live in the now.

Marcus sighs, taking it all in. What Sutter’s saying makes sense.

MARCUS
Thank you for talking to me like this, Sutter. I appreciate it. I really do.

SUTTER
Well sure --

MARCUS
You’re a good man.

Sutter nods, feeling pretty good about the whole thing. Marcus walks back to his car.

MARCUS
Hey Sutter!
(Sutter turns)
They’re wrong about you.

SUTTER
What’s that?

MARCUS
You’re not the joke everyone thinks.

Sutter flinches, as if he just received the punch he was expecting all along. Marcus leaves and we remain on Sutter, thinking about that. CUT TO:

INT AIMEE’S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Sutter and Aimee sitting close together on her couch, watching TV.
SUTTER
What do you think of the movie?

AIMEE
I’ve seen it before.

SUTTER
Oh. We can watch something else.

AIMEE
No I like it. Used to watch it with my Dad all the time. He loved this stuff.

SUTTER
Really? My kind of guy.

AIMEE
You would have liked him a lot. He’s the one who turned me onto music and manga and stuff. He was cool.

Sutter puts his arms around her. Aimee likes the feeling.

AIMEE
What about you?

SUTTER
Hmm?

AIMEE
Do you miss your Dad?

SUTTER
Nah it’s cool.

AIMEE
He’s not flying back soon?

SUTTER
What?

AIMEE
You said he was an... airline pilot.

SUTTER
Um... yeah, exactly.

AIMEE
So... why can’t he fly to come see you?

SUTTER
Why are we talking about this?

AIMEE
It’s important. If my Dad was alive --

SUTTER
I’m trying to watch the movie.
AIMEE
I’m just saying... you should see him, before it’s too late.

Sutter says nothing.

AIMEE
Maybe you can ask your mom --

SUTTER
(jumping up)
Goddamit Aimee! Will you shut up already? Jesus Christ.

Aimee’s face flushes red and she shrinks away. This is the first time Sutter’s gotten mad at her and it stings.

AIMEE
I’m sorry.

SUTTER
(realizing he snapped)
No, I’m sorry. You just... kept going on and on.

AIMEE
(looking away)
I know. I don’t know what’s wrong with me.

SUTTER
(sitting back down)
Nothing’s wrong with you. I’m just... a little touchy about my Dad, ok. Come here. I’m sorry I yelled.

Sutter hugs her tight. He then lifts her chin to look at him. Then he kisses her. The mouth. The forehead. The eyelids. Kissing the tears away. It grows in intensity.

INT AIMEE’S BEDROOM – MOMENTS LATER
And now they’re on the bed, kissing, fondling.

AIMEE
Can we take off our clothes?

There’s no stopping it now. Sutter lifts off Aimee’s shirt. Aimee takes off her own bra. Sutter then takes his shirt off. Aimee helps him with his pants. It’s awkward but there’s a real romance to it. Sutter sees Aimee in a new light. And he’s amazed at what he sees.

SUTTER
Nudity looks awesome on you.
They get under the covers together. Feeling each other’s bodies. Aimee stops first. Reaching over to the night stand. She pulls out a condom.

AIMEE
Just to be safe.

Sutter is surprised. Girl’s got all the bases covered. Aimee helps him put the condom on. And then pulls him over towards her so he can be on top.

AIMEE
I like you so much.

SUTTER
You’re spectacular. You really are.

AIMEE
I’m so glad I met you.

SUTTER
I’m glad I met you too.

Slowly, tenderly, they begin to have sex. Sutter looks down at Aimee’s face. Her eyes are closed. It’s very different from sex with Cassidy but in a way it’s better. More intimate. More connected. Sutter is entranced.

- LATER. They lie in bed together. Post-coital.

AIMEE
You’re incredible.

SUTTER
Nah. It’s easy to seem that way on your first time.
(Aimee looks away)
It was your first time, wasn’t it...?
Aimee?

Her silence says maybe it wasn’t.

SUTTER
I thought you said you never had a boyfriend.

Aimee sits up, pulls her knees to her chest. Chin down, looking very distraught.

AIMEE
I don’t want you to hate me.

SUTTER
Hate you? I won’t hate you. You’re unhatable.
AIMEE
It’s just something that happened... I was 14. I didn’t know anything about boys.

SUTTER
Ok.

AIMEE
Randy’s son Troy was sleeping over.

SUTTER
Randy? Your Step-father Randy?

AIMEE
(nods)
We all went to sleep and then I heard this knock on my door. Troy said he couldn’t sleep and would I mind if he came in, talked for a while.

SUTTER
Of course he did.

AIMEE
He climbed in my bed. Got under the covers. And started... saying all this stuff to me...

SUTTER
What kind of stuff?

AIMEE
You know. How warm I feel. How much he likes my mouth and my hair.

SUTTER
Smooth talker, this Troy.

AIMEE
No one ever spoke to me like that. It felt... I don’t know... special. So I just... let him do it.
(beat)
I should have known better.

SUTTER
How could you? You were 14.

AIMEE
I still should have known no 20 year old would actually like me --

SUTTER
20? Are you fucking kidding me?
AIMEE
And the worst part is... when we... finished... he couldn't look at me. Drove away in the morning. I've never seen him since.

SUTTER
Oh man! That dude is king of the creeps. If I ever see that guy -- I can't believe your mom stayed with Randy after that.

AIMEE
I never told her.

SUTTER
You never... How could you not --

AIMEE
I've never told anyone that. Until now.

They both lie there quietly. Aimee puts her head on his chest. Sutter sits there thinking. Then he hears her lose it.

SUTTER
Don't cry.

AIMEE
You must think I'm awful.

SUTTER
I don't think you're awful. Why would you say that?
   (beat)
I'll tell you a secret.
   (beat)
My Dad's not a pilot... I'm not sure what he is. Or where. I just said that because... I don't know... I don't know anything about him. He's been gone half my life and I... I guess I just miss him.

AIMEE
Doesn't anyone know where he is?

SUTTER
Just my mom. She refuses to tell me.

AIMEE
That's terrible! She can't keep him from you. He's your father.

Sutter looks away. Uncomfortable.

AIMEE
(beat)
I'll make you a deal. I'll stand up to my Mom, if you stand up to yours.
Sutter looks at her. Aimee puts out her hand to shake.

AIMEE
What do you say? Deal?

Sutter hesitates. Then he just smiles, touches her face. Instead of answering he says:

SUTTER
You’re spectacular.

And then they lay together. She strokes his hair as he looks at the ceiling.

INT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Sutter waits in line to take his Yearbook picture. Cassidy approaches.

CASSIDY
(fixes his hair)
There you go.

SUTTER
Thanks.

CASSIDY
Haven’t seen you in a while.

SUTTER
How’s Marcus?

CASSIDY
Good. How’s Aimee?

SUTTER
Couldn’t be better.

A beat.

CASSIDY
I gotta say, Sutter, I’m impressed.
(off his look)
I admire you... for going out with her.

SUTTER
“Admire?” That’s an odd word.

CASSIDY
No I mean... you don’t usually go for those kinds of girls.

SUTTER
What can I say? I’m evolving.
CASSIDY
(coy)
Maybe you’ll amount to something after all.

SUTTER
I’m already something. I’m a miraculous marvel is what I am.

She laughs. It’s comfortable between them.

CASSIDY
Anyway... I’d better get back. Good seeing you.

She turns to go. He watches.

INT HALLWAY - LATER
Sutter is walking to class when he hears:

VOICE
Sutter!

Mr. Aster calls to him from inside his classroom.

MR. ASTER
Would you come in here please?

Sutter exhales and turns left into Aster’s class.

MR. ASTER
Have a seat.

Aster hands him a homework assignment. A big red D+.

SUTTER
(upbeat)
It’s not an F.

MR. ASTER
I thought you were getting help.

SUTTER
I am.

MR. ASTER
Well now you need a C on the final or you fail my class.

SUTTER
I’ll try harder.

MR. ASTER
No you won’t.

That takes Sutter by surprise.
MR. ASTER
I don't get you, Sutter. You're a smart kid. Thoughtful. Do you even want to graduate?

SUTTER
(beat; thinks about it)
I’m not sure.

MR. ASTER
Excuse me?

SUTTER
I’m being honest with you. The truth is, I really don’t know. I like it here. I like being young. Everybody’s rushing me to grow up, move on -- why? What’s so great about it?

Aster doesn’t know what to say.

SUTTER
Are you happy, Mr. Aster?

Aster is silent. Sutter shrugs. Takes his paper and goes.

INT AIMEE’S HOUSE - PROM NIGHT

Tuxedo-clad Sutter stands in the kitchen with Aimee’s MOM and Randy. Aimee’s Mom has the camera out and is readying to take some prom pictures.

AIMEE’S MOM
Randy, get in there with Sutter.

The two men pose for the picture. As odd a couple as you’re likely to see. Sutter pretends to be comfortable.

Finally Aimee comes down. She’s wearing the lipstick again, her dress is a pale yellow that doesn’t quite match her skin tone, and she’s done her hair up in a leaning tower of Pisa style do. An awkward girl trying too hard to look elegant. Sutter doesn’t care about that.

SUTTER
You look fabuloso.

AIMEE
Thanks. So do you.

They do the boutonniere/ corsage exchange. Mom takes a few more. Randy’s already turned his attention to the game on TV. They say their goodbyes and they’re off.

INT SUTTER’S CAR - LATER

Sutter’s car has been washed for the occasion. They sit together.
SUTTER
Sorry I didn’t get you a limo.

AIMEE
That’s ok.

SUTTER
Let me make it up to you.

He pulls out a small wrapped gift from the glove compartment.

AIMEE
You didn’t have to --

SUTTER
I wanted to.

Aimee tears the wrapping paper off of the box. Opens it. A flask.

SUTTER
Just like mine. And you’ll notice it’s already full too.

AIMEE
I love it!

SUTTER
Shall we (toast)?
(raising his flask)
To you, Aimee Finecky.

They toast. Aimee leans in to kiss him. When it’s over:

SUTTER
Ok then. Let’s go to prom!

EXT HORSE RACING TRACK - LATER

Sutter and Aimee arrive at the venue which, when not hosting a high school prom, is a horse track. Tonight it’s lit up with white Xmas lights and made to look very romantic. Aimee adjusts the straps on her ill-fitting dress. Sneaks a drink from her flask. Sutter takes Aimee’s arm and they walk inside.

INT BANQUET HALL - SAME

The prom is already in full swing and it’s very much like you’d expect -- DJ, punch bowl, padded chairs, white tablecloths. Through Sutter’s eyes, the whole place sparkles.

People greet him as they always do when he shows up to a party. High-fives etc. Sutter and Aimee choose a half-empty table to sit at. Sutter pulls out a chair for her like a gentleman. They sit and take it all in.
SUTTER
You want some punch?

AIMEE
Sure.

SUTTER
Back in a jiff.

Sutter heads over to the punch bowl. Pours two glasses. Nods to Ricky who is sitting with Beth. And then he sees Cassidy, on the dance floor with Marcus. Her dress is amazing, showing off her voluptuous body in the perfect way. Sutter takes a moment to watch but then shakes it off, heads back to his table, hands Aimee the punch which she immediately spikes.

AIMEE
Cheers.

Sutter wants to give Aimee his full attention but his eyes can’t help returning to Cassidy. Eventually:

AIMEE
She’s a good dancer.

SUTTER
Hmm?

AIMEE
Cassidy.

SUTTER
Oh, yeah, I hadn’t noticed.

Aimee doesn’t push the issue. Sutter downs another drink. And so does Aimee. The song ends and Cassidy sees Sutter at the table. She walks over with Marcus.

CASSIDY
Why aren’t you two dancing?

SUTTER
You know I hate this kind of music.

CASSIDY
Who cares? It’s the prom. Aimee, c’mon!

AIMEE
I’m not much of a dancer.

SUTTER
That’s why you got me. I can teach you some of my moves.

AIMEE
(taking a big sip)
I’m good right here. You two go ahead.
Sutter and Cassidy share a look.

*SUTTER*

You sure?

*AIMEE*

It’s fine.

Aimee takes out her flask and re-spikes the drink. Sutter hesitates for a beat, sizing up whether Aimee is telling the truth.

*SUTTER*

If you change your mind...

Aimee turns back around. Sutter shrugs. He and Cassidy head to the dance floor. Once they’re dancing:

*CASSIDY*

She looks nice.

*SUTTER*

She does.

*CASSIDY*

What’s with the flask? You’re not turning her into a lush are you?

*SUTTER*

You wanna dance or lecture me about Aimee?

*CASSIDY*

I wanna dance.

Sutter spins her. They’re getting more comfortable now. Sutter accidentally bumps into another guy who looks pissed. Sutter apologizes.

Song over, Sutter bows to Cassidy who curtsies back. Then they part ways. He watches her walk over to Marcus before turning to walk back to Aimee.

Sutter kisses her cheek as he sits down next to her. Aimee smiles. Seems like she means it. Then again, might be the alcohol talking. Sutter takes her hand and holds it at the table. He looks around the room. Sees Ricky and Beth having fun. Sees Shawnie twirling on the dance floor with her date. Everything he sees makes him happy.

*SUTTER*

Amazing, isn’t it, Aim? All these kids. Dressed up, dancing, singing, falling in love... This is our night! St. Patrick’s Day for the young.

(beat)

Do you realize -- right now, this moment, this is as young as we’re ever gonna be.

(MORE)
This is it. The spectacular now.

God, I love these people.

The song ends and a new one begins, slower, more romantic. Sutter grabs Aimee and gestures to the dance floor. This time she doesn’t resist. They dance. She puts her head on Sutter’s shoulder.

AIMEE
I’m sorry I can’t dance like Cassidy.

SUTTER
You dance like Aimee. And that’s perfect.

We stay with them a few beats. A nice moment.

- LATER. Sutter and Aimee walk out of the main room and out onto the grounds.

AIMEE
We’re gonna miss the King and Queen.

SUTTER
Fuck that. We’re all Kings and Queens tonight.

AIMEE
(starting to slur)
That’s right! I’m the Queen.

SUTTER
And I’m your King.

AIMEE
I need to sit down.

They take their seat on a bench. The stars are out tonight. It’s beautiful. Neither says a word for a second. Aimee starts to but stops herself.

SUTTER
What is it?

AIMEE
You have any more?

SUTTER
Uh, yeah, here.

AIMEE
(drinks)
I’ve been thinking... about the summer. My sister said she could get me a job at a book store.

SUTTER
In St. Louis?
AIMEE
Uh-huh.

SUTTER
A book store’s perfect for you.

AIMEE
I know! And it’ll help pay for college.

SUTTER
Have you talked to your mom yet?

AIMEE
No but I will.

SUTTER
That’s excellent. I can’t think of anything better.

AIMEE
I can.

(beat)
Come with me....

Sutter doesn’t know what to say to that.

AIMEE
I’ve looked into it. You can take classes at the junior College. We’ll both get jobs downtown. In our free time we can go to Forest Park or hang out by the river. Have you ever seen the Mississippi? I’ve only seen pictures but it looks amazing.

SUTTER
(beat)
Wow. That’s... that’s some plan. You’ve really done your homework.

AIMEE
Yeah. And best of all my sister says there’s tons of vacancies in her building cause of the economy and stuff. They’re not expensive at all. We could move at the end of June. You and me.

Sutter remains dazed, silent.

AIMEE
Sutter... what do you think?

Looking at Aimee, Sutter knows there’s only two possibilities. Break her heart right now -- or just go with it.

SUTTER
I think... that’s a terrific idea. Best I’ve ever heard.
Aimee embraces him. They kiss. We can tell what she can’t: Sutter is not convinced about any of this.

-LATER. Sutter and Aimee walk back into the room. Aimee is ecstatic. Sutter looks pained now. The joy of the buzz completely sucked out of him.

The prom itself seems to be equally pallid. The room has thinned out. The glitter is crumbling. The lame decorations are half on the ground. There’s no sign of Sutter’s friends. Depression threatening, Sutter makes his move.

SUTTER
This is ridiculous.

Hops up on the riser and grabs the mic from the DJ.

SUTTER
Can I have everybody’s attention?

The music stops. There’s a little feedback from the mic.

SUTTER
Come on people, let’s pick this party up.
This is our night.

Some people yell out “woo Sutter” etc. Aimee is by this point too drunk to shout. Others are clearly less enthusiastic.

SUTTER
How bout I add a little class to the evening?
(clears his throat)
A 1 and a 2 and 1 2 3..
(sings)
“You’re nobody till somebody loves you.
You’re nobody till somebody cares.” Sing it with me.

Sutter doesn’t remember the next line. The crowd starts to turn on him.

SUTTER
Da da da... shit. Um... “Head keeps spinning, go to sleep grinning, if this is just the beginning, my life will be beautiful!”

SOMEONE IN THE CROWD
Sit down!

SUTTER
You sit down. Dickhead.

SOMEONE ELSE
Go back to rehab!
Other kids start shouting too. Mr. Aster runs over to put a stop to it.

MR. ASTER
Alright Mr. Keely, that’s enough.

SUTTER
I’m just warming up.

MR. ASTER
I said that’s enough.

SUTTER
This is our night, Mr. Asterhole, not yours.

Some people cheer the dig at the teacher but not everyone.

MR. ASTER
That’s it, your prom’s over.

SUTTER
Fine. We’ll take this party elsewhere.

Sutter drops the mic on the ground. Hops off the riser. Stumbles a little on the way down but covers it up well enough. He still thinks he’s under control but the stares from his classmates say otherwise. Sutter pays them no mind. Cassidy runs up to him.

CASSIDY
You have to take Aimee home.

SUTTER
Cass where you been?

CASSIDY
In the bathroom with your girlfriend. She passed out on the floor!

SUTTER
Ouch. Was it my singing?

CASSIDY
This is not a joke Sutter.

SUTTER
Ok, ok, I’ll take care of her.

CASSIDY
I don’t think you know how.

SUTTER
Hey, this is none of your business, Cass.
CASSIDY
It’s not about me. And it’s not about us.
It’s about -

AIMEE
Stop!

Aimee comes out, walking at a bit of a tilt, covered in vomit, angry.

AIMEE
Get away from him. You’re not his boyfriend.

CASSIDY
I was just trying to get him to --

AIMEE
I know what you were trying to do. You were practically... dancefucking!

SUTTER
Whoa.

CASSIDY
Aimee --

AIMEE
Stay away from him, you fat bitch.

At which point Aimee winds up and slaps Cassidy across the face, hard. But in the process, she loses her balance and falls onto the punch bowl table, crashing it to the floor. Cassidy looks at Sutter as if to say “look what you’ve done to her.” Sutter receives the look, brushes it off, and runs to Aimee’s aid.

SUTTER
Can you sit up? Are you cut? Come on, let’s get you up in this chair.

He lifts her up, gently.

AIMEE
I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.

SUTTER
Don’t be sorry. It’s the prom, things happen at the prom.

AIMEE
I’m such a mess.

SUTTER
You’re beautiful. Let’s get out of here.

Sutter helps Aimee to her feet. She takes one step and vomits again onto the floor.
Anyone still watching the scene (which is most people) groan at the sight. Sutter sees Cassidy still giving him that look, the same one he got a thousand times as her boyfriend.

SUTTER
She’s just not used to partying so hard.

AIMEE
Cassidy, I’m sorry...

CASSIDY
It’s OK.

AIMEE
(starts crying)
No, really...

CASSIDY
Take her home, Sutter.

SUTTER
I will. Come on, baby, you’ll be alright. Everything’s gonna be alright.

And with Cass watching, as he helps her out of the room:

AIMEE
I love you, Sutter. I love you so much.

And this is like a gunshot to Sutter. Of all the things to happen tonight, that one stings the most.

BLACK.

HOLD A FEW SECONDS AND THEN FADE IN:

INT CLOTHING STORE - A FEW DAYS LATER

Sutter rings up a customer -- Jason Doyle.

SUTTER
Nice-looking suit.

JASON DOYLE
Present from my pops. You should have seen him when I got into Dartmouth. Guy was in tears.

Sutter doesn’t say anything.

JASON DOYLE
You pick a college?

SUTTER
Yeah.
JASON DOYLE
Which one?

SUTTER
(beat)
F.U.

JASON DOYLE
Nice. Go Gators.

SUTTER
See ya around Jason.

Once he’s gone, Bob appears in the doorway to the back room.

BOB
Sutter --

Bob gestures for Sutter to follow him into the back. Sutter does. Sits down in the desk across from him.

BOB
You’ve probably noticed we’re not too busy these days. And because of that... well, I can only keep one clerk. (Sutter nods, waits for it)

You know I like you, Sutter. More importantly, the customers like you. So I think you should be the one I keep.

SUTTER
That’s excellent, Bob. Thank you! You won’t regret it.

BOB
Hold on a sec. (beat)

I’ve given this some hard thought, and the only way I can let you stay is if you promise me, 100 percent, that you’ll never come in here loaded again.

Sutter is taken aback by this. He never thought Bob was on to him.

BOB
I’m serious. Not even a light buzz. And if you do, one time, I’m gonna have to let you go. Do you understand?

SUTTER
I do.

BOB
Can you promise me, Sutter?
Bob looks Sutter in the eye. Sutter holds his gaze for a beat, then laughs to himself.

**SUTTER**
You’ve got me there, don’t you, Bob? You know I can’t promise that.

Bob looks at Sutter, disappointed, hoping he’ll reconsider. Knows he won’t.

**BOB**
I appreciate your honesty.

**SUTTER**
Of course, Bob. I’m always up front with you.

Sutter, proud of himself, rises to shake Bob’s hand.

**SUTTER**
It’s been a pleasure working for you Sir.

Bob stares at him a beat. Then shakes his hand.

**BOB**
I guess... if I was your dad, here’s where I’d give you a lecture or something... ‘bout what you’re doing to yourself.

**SUTTER**
You know what, Bob... If you were my Dad, you wouldn’t have to.

**EXT CLOTHING STORE - END OF DAY**

Sutter leaves, loosening his tie on the way out. Feeling pretty good until:

**CASSIDY**
Can we talk to you for a minute?

Cassidy stands on the sidewalk.

**SUTTER**
Who’s we?

She points to a parked car. Marcus and Ricky are inside.

**INT MARCUS’ CAR - CONTINUOUS**

Sutter sits next to Ricky in the back. Marcus and Cassidy are in the front. They all look at him.

**SUTTER**
Please tell me this isn’t one of those, ‘We’re worried about your drinking’ intervention type things.
RICKY
No, Sutter. We know you better than that.

CASSIDY
It’s more like an Aimee Finecky intervention thing.

SUTTER
What are you talking about?

MARCUS
You’re hurting her, dude. Don’t you see that?

SUTTER
I’m hurting her? How am I hurting her?

CASSIDY
We never once saw her drink before. Now she’s gets drunk between classes. She’s hungover every morning --

SUTTER
Excuse me. Since when do any of you give a shit about Aimee?

MARCUS
That’s not the point --

SUTTER
Of course it is. You don’t know her. You look at her and see this little mouse who should keep quiet and hide in the corner, don’t you? Well I see more than that. I see someone whose dreams are as big as all of yours put together. Someone who can stand up for herself now. And do you know why? Cause of me. I did that.

RICKY
You think you’re some kind of hero?

SUTTER
Yes as a matter of fact --

RICKY
Fuck off, Sutter. You’re not a hero. You’re just using her... to keep from dealing with your own shit.

SUTTER
Really. One girl gives you the time of day and now you’re an expert --

RICKY
Fuck you.
SUTTER

Fuck you!

Before push comes to shove:

CASSIDY

Guys. Cool it!
(beat; to Sutter)
Can we talk alone for a minute?

EXT PARKING LOT - SAME

Sutter and Cassidy lean against Sutter’s car. Silent at first.

CASSIDY

It’s a nice night.

SUTTER

I’ve had better.

CASSIDY

This was my idea. So don’t blame the guys. Look, we just want what’s best for Aimee.

SUTTER

And that’s not me?

CASSIDY

It could be. Maybe. If you tried.

Sutter stands there for a moment without saying anything. He watches some garbage get blown across the parking lot.

SUTTER

If you really have this vast knowledge about me and relationships, then you’d know I don’t need to break anything off. She’ll take care of that soon enough, just like you did.

CASSIDY

You think that was easy for me? Say what you want, but you’re the one who made it clear we didn’t have a future. And I get it. That’s you, that’s who you are. But Aimee’s different. You’re her whole world. She thinks there’s a future with you and there isn’t.

SUTTER

Yeah? What makes you so sure?

CASSIDY

What do you mean?
SUTTER
I mean... maybe there is one. A future. Maybe in the Fall the two of us are moving in together.

CASSIDY
What?

SUTTER
It’s all set. Her sister got us a place in St. Louis. Heading out right after graduation.

CASSIDY
You can’t be serious.

SUTTER
As a heart attack. Just gave my two weeks notice to Bob. (beat; Cass is shocked) Guess you don’t know everything, do you Cass?

And with that, Sutter (like Shane) flips the double bird to his friends and gets in the car. Cassidy watches him drive off, shocked.

EXT HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Sutter and Aimee walk towards the parking lot. Some kids laugh and point. One shouts:

CLASSMATE
Puke-a-reena!

Sutter wants to go get in that guy’s face but Aimee keeps him walking.

AIMEE
It’s ok. Come on.

SUTTER
Where are we going?

AIMEE
Just come on.

They get to his car and Aimee pulls out her flask.

SUTTER
You sure you wanna --

AIMEE
We’re celebrating. (off his look) I did it. I talked to my mom.
SUTTER
(surprised)
What did you say?

AIMEE
I just walked in, shut off Nancy Grace, and I told her. It’s my life and I’m not going to let that stupid paper route get in the way.

SUTTER
And it worked?

AIMEE
It was ugly at first. She tried to guilt me into staying but I refused to back down. I just said, look, if I can afford it, I’m going and there’s nothing you can do about it.

SUTTER
That’s amazing! I’m so proud of you!

AIMEE
I’m proud of myself! Cheers.

SUTTER
(beat)
Cheers.

They drink.

SUTTER
Wow Aim, you’re like my hero.

AIMEE
It wasn’t so bad. You’ll see.

Hmm?

AIMEE
When you do it.

Sutter looks away.

AIMEE
We made a deal.

Aimee --

AIMEE
You can do it Sutter. I know you can.

SUTTER
You don’t know her. She’s...
AIMEE
You can do it.

Sutter isn’t so sure.

AIMEE
Repeat after me. “I want to call him, Mom.” “I want to motherfucking call him.”


INT HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT
An elegant, upscale hotel downtown. Mary works behind the Front Desk checking in a customer. Sutter takes a deep breath and walks in through the automatic doors. Waits patiently for his Mom to finish.

Mary sees him. This is a surprise. Beckons him over.

MARY
What’s wrong?

SUTTER
Nothing. I, uh, I want to ask you something.

MARY
What is it?

A beat.

SUTTER
It’s about Dad.

MARY
(not again)
Sutter --

SUTTER
I just want to talk to him.

MARY
We’ve been over this. It’s not a good idea --

SUTTER
Why not?

MARY
I don’t need a reason, do I?

SUTTER
Yes you do! He’s my father.

MARY
Well I’m your mother and you live under my roof.
SUTTER
I wish I didn't.

MARY
(beat)
I know that, Sutter, but that's the way it is.

SUTTER
You can't keep him from me. It's not right.

MARY
(quiet but stern)
Sutter... this is my job. We'll talk about it later, Ok? I have guests.

SUTTER
Mom, please --

MARY
Enough!
(to Guest)
Hi, may I help you?

The Guest looks at Sutter. Sutter looks at his Mom. Mary ignores him. A standoff. One that Sutter is not gonna win.

SUTTER
No wonder he left you.

And with that, Sutter grabs a handful of mints from the jar on the counter. Storms off.

EXT SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Sutter sits on the patio with Holly, who, as usual, is overdressed for the occasion. Sutter watches with amusement as she fusses with food and drinks.

HOLLY
How do you like the way we've relandscaped back here? Joe and I planted some --

SUTTER
That's nice, yeah. So like I said on the phone, I wanted to talk to you about Dad.

HOLLY
Oh Sutter, why do you want to dredge that up?

SUTTER

(MORE)
SUTTER (CONT'D)
Remember how he used to tell us stories out in the tent in the backyard?

HOLLY
That was mostly you. I was a little old for stories by the time we got that tent.

SUTTER
Well, you remember our vacation in Mexico? He had us going up to people and asking ‘em ‘Where can we find the belt buckle museum?’ or ‘Why is there no artichoke ice cream?’ It was hilarious.

HOLLY
It was embarrassing.

SUTTER
People thought it was funny. They loved us.

HOLLY
They loved you because you were little and cute.

SUTTER
But the guys loved you. They thought you were a hot little muchacha.

Holly remembers, then smiles.

HOLLY
He did know how to make friends, didn’t he?

SUTTER
Damn right he did.

They sit in silence for a moment.

SUTTER
Do you know happened? Between him and Mom?

HOLLY
He cheated on her.

SUTTER
How do you know that? That’s her version.

HOLLY
You think it’s a lie?

SUTTER
I’m not saying she’s lying. I’m saying there’s two sides to every story.
HOLLY

Sutter --

SUTTER
Think about it. She won’t let us see him.
Won’t say where he is --

HOLLY
Let’s talk about something else. How’s your friend, how’s Aimee?

SUTTER
-- won’t even give us his number. You gotta admit, it’s suspicious.

Holly’s face shows that she’s thinking about it.

SUTTER
I tried asking Mom but she refuses. That’s why I need your help. Would you call her for me? Find out where he is?
(off her look)
Please, Holl. Will you ask her?

HOLLY
(beat, looks at Sutter)
I don’t have to ask her. I know where he is.

Sutter looks at her, expectantly. She goes inside for a moment. When she returns she hands Sutter a slip of paper. Sutter looks at a phone number, then at his sister. Psyched!

SUTTER
Thanks, Holl. Seriously. You’re the best!

Sutter jumps up to go.

HOLLY
Sutter!
(he turns, beat)
Come by for lunch sometime. Ok?

SUTTER
I will. Promise!

Holly watches him go, apprehensive.

INT SUTTER’S HOME – DAY

Sutter is alone. Miles Davis plays in the background. He fixes himself a drink. Downs it. Takes a deep breath. Then takes out a piece of paper on which there is a phone number. Sutter picks up the phone. He seems nervous. Dials. After a few rings a deep, masculine VOICE answers.
VOICE (O.S.)
Hello?

SUTTER
(tentative)
Um.... Dad?

VOICE (O.S.)
I think you got the wrong --

SUTTER
It’s me, Sutter.

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
(perks up)
Sutter!? No shit, kiddo! How you doing? You sound like a man now!

SUTTER
(smiling)
Well, yeah.

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
How are you?

SUTTER
I’m alright.

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
Good. Good. You still playing baseball?

SUTTER
What?

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
You were a heckuva pitcher back in the day. Small for your age but what an arm.

Sutter is overcome with emotion but he sucks it down.

SUTTER
You remember that?

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
Sure, son, sure I do. Still throwing?

SUTTER
I, uh, no. Not really.

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
How’s your Mom and Holly doing?

SUTTER
They’re good, Dad... Real good.

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
That’s great. That’s... tremendous.
And then silence for a beat.

SUTTER
Listen, Dad, I, uh, I was thinking... could I come see you sometime...?

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
Of course you can. Come on over! How’s Friday?

SUTTER
Oh, uh, really?

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
Come by at like 3 o’clock. Maybe we’ll go to a game.

SUTTER
(cloud nine)
That would be great.

SUTTER’S DAD (O.S.)
Tremendous. See you then --

SUTTER
Hey, uh, Dad... where, um, where do you live?

INT SUTTER’S CAR - DAY

Sutter and Aimee speed down the highway, filled with excitement. Music on, windows down, feeling good. Sutter sips from the Big Gulp. Aimee looks through the recently released High School Yearbook.

AIMEE
How much further is it?

SUTTER
Another three hours or so.
(beat; sincere)
Hey Aim... thank you.

AIMEE
For what?

SUTTER
I wouldn’t have done this without you.

He grabs her hand. She holds his, touched. Smiles. Sutter looks at the road again. Anticipation building.

EXT DAD’S HOME - LATER

Sutter and Aimee pull into a parking area in front of a row of townhouses. The whole place looks very poorly cared for.
SUTTER
(checking slip of paper)
Here we are.
(beat)
I think I need that shot of vodka now.

They take a couple of shots. Then a couple more. Sutter looks at her.

SUTTER
Ok. Let’s do it.

EXT DAD’S DOORSTEP - MOMENTS LATER

Sutter rings the doorbell. After a few moments he rings again. After the third ring the door opens. TOMMY KEELY, (late 40s) extremely handsome but in a worn, creased way.

TOMMY
Well, hello there. What can I do for you?

SUTTER
(confused)
It’s... me.

Tommy stares blankly at him.

SUTTER
Sutter.

TOMMY
(realizing)
Sutter! Hey! Oh, of course. Man, what am I thinking? I forgot you were coming. Good to see you buddy.

Tommy shakes Sutter’s hand. No hug.

TOMMY
And who is this striking young lady?

SUTTER
This is Aimee. My girlfriend. Aimee, this is my Dad.

He takes Aimee’s hand, then kisses it. She blushes.

TOMMY
Call me Tommy. You have immaculate taste in the ladies, don’t you?
(winks at her)
Just like his old man.

Tommy smiles at Sutter. This is followed by an awkward silence. Tommy doesn’t yet invite them in.

TOMMY
Man it’s good to see you.
SUTTER
You too Dad --

TOMMY
Listen, I was on my way to meet some friends of mine but now that you’re here, let’s all go together. What do you say?

SUTTER (looks at Aimee; she shrugs)
Um... ok.

TOMMY
Great. You take your car and follow me there. It’s just up the road. Come on.

Tommy gets in his beat-up Wagoneer. Sutter and Aimee head back to the Mitsubishi. Once inside:

AIMEE
Another shot of whisky, doctor?

SUTTER
Stat.

INT LARRY’S - LATER

A dark and dirty little bbq joint adjacent to the highway. The BARTENDER and some of the REGULARS greet Tommy when he enters, much like Sutter’s friends when they see him enter a room. After a few hello’s:

TOMMY
Everybody... this here is my son, Sutter.

Everybody welcomes Sutter with raised glasses and a few pats on the back. Tommy seems proud. Sutter and Aimee are elated. When they reach the end of the bar the bathroom door opens and out comes ROBERTA (45, short dress, trashy). Tommy is surprised to see her.

TOMMY
Well if it isn’t the most beautiful woman in this here entire state.

ROBERTA
Last week you said the country.

TOMMY
Did I?

Tommy smiles at her. Winks.

ROBERTA
(beat) Aren’t you gonna introduce me to your friends?
TOMMY (realizing)
Where are my manners? Roberta... I’d you to meet my son. The amazing Sutter Keely. And his ladyfriend Aimee.

Sutter beams. Roberta moves right up to him.

ROBERTA
Get your good looks from your mother, did ya?

SUTTER
Ma’am.

Roberta kisses Sutter on the cheek and walks away.

TOMMY (watching her go)
Ain’t she somethin’? Let’s get some drinks!

LATER. Tommy sits with Sutter and Aimee at a corner table. Sutter and Aimee drink beers. Nobody’s minding.

TOMMY
... and after that I moved to Key West. You guys ever been down there?
(they haven’t)
You don’t know what you’re missing. Key West, now that is the life, boy. Sunsets like a butterscotch sundae with swirls of strawberry mixed in, melting into the ocean. Everyone with a drink and a smile.

Tommy grins, and so does Sutter.

SUTTER
Sounds perfect.

TOMMY
It was.
(beat)
Wish you could have been there kiddo.

SUTTER
So how come you left?

TOMMY
Ran out of dough is why. Would have stayed there forever if I could, believe me.

Tommy looks in the direction of Roberta, who is sitting at the bar chatting with other men. His stare lingers there a bit.
SUTTER
Hey how bout some music?

TOMMY
That’s a great idea. You take care of that. I’ll go get us a refill.

Tommy gets up and walks over to the bar. Sutter goes to the jukebox with Aimee.

AIMEE
You OK?

SUTTER
Never better.

She squeezes his arm and smiles back. Sutter finds exactly what he’s looking for on the jukebox. Dean Martin’s “Aint That a Kick in the Head” begins to play. They go back and sit down.

ANGLE ON Tommy, new pitcher in hand. On his way back to the table, he stops and whispers something in Roberta’s ear. She eyes him flirtatiously.

Tommy sits back down. Sutter smiles, expecting Tommy to react to the music. He doesn’t.

SUTTER
(beat, proud)
Dean Martin.

TOMMY
Uh-huh.

SUTTER
Don’t you like this song?

TOMMY
Eh, this was always your mother’s thing.

This is news to Sutter. It’s a bit of a shock. His only response is to take a large drink of his beer.

SUTTER
But it’s... fun. I can’t imagine Mom ever having fun --

TOMMY
Your mother? Are you kidding? When we first got married... boy was she something. Nobody was more fun than that woman.

Again, Sutter is stunned. And again Tommy is looking away at Roberta.
SUTTER
So... what happened?

TOMMY
(still looking away)
What do you mean?

SUTTER
What happened... between you two?

Now Tommy turns back around.

TOMMY
(takes another drink)
Things don’t work out sometimes.

Sutter processes. Aimee watches him, growing increasingly concerned. And then:

SUTTER
You know she blames you for everything. Won’t even let us talk about you.

Tommy does not seem the least bit surprised.

SUTTER
I defend you though. I always defend you.

TOMMY
Thanks, kiddo. I appreciate that.
(beat)
Wasn’t all my fault.

SUTTER
Right. There’s two sides to every story.

TOMMY
Damn straight.

SUTTER
And whatever happened, she still shouldn’t have kicked you out of the house.

TOMMY
Oh she didn’t kick me out.

What?

SUTTER
I left.

Sutter can’t believe it.

TOMMY
I had to. I mean, I did want to be there for you. Man, did I ever want that.
(MORE)
You guys were more important to me than anything in the world. But... well... things between your mother and I just got to be so... *uncool*. Once she caught me with that --

(beat)

Guess I wasn’t cut out to be a family man, not in the traditional sense anyway.

Tommy laughs. The room is now spinning for Sutter. Tommy sees his face.

**TOMMY**

You know how it is. One thing leads to another... the girls don’t mean anything.

**SUTTER**

Girls? Like, more than one?

**TOMMY**

(shrugs)

Not like I kept a running tally.

(beat)

But hey, I don’t live in the past. I live in the now. That’s what it’s all about. Right, kid?

Sutter looks like he might throw up. Tommy sees Roberta get up and leave the bar. Tommy jumps up.

**TOMMY**

I’ll be right back. Settle the tab for me, will ya?

**SUTTER**

Um, sure.

**TOMMY**

Thanks bud. You’re a miraculous marvel.

And with that he heads outside. Sutter just watches him go.

**AIMEE**

Sutter...?

But he’s just sitting there, staring out the window at Tommy, who’s now pressing up close to Roberta, whispering in her ear. She laughs and playfully pushes him away.

**AIMEE**

Sutter.

Sutter snaps back to attention. Opens his wallet to pay Tommy’s bill. He only has a few bucks. He looks to Aimee with embarrassment.
AIMEE
Don’t worry about it. Really.

SUTTER
I’m sorry.

AIMEE
Don’t be.

Tommy comes back inside.

TOMMY
(winks)
So Roberta’s had a few too many drinks. Think I’d better give her a ride home. If you know what I mean.

SUTTER
Oh... Um... you want us to follow you?

TOMMY
I got it covered. Won’t be more than an hour.

SUTTER
But -- why don’t we come with you? We’re not doing any--

TOMMY
No need. You guys head on back to my place. I’ll be right there I promise.

The bad feeling growing, Sutter tries one more time.

SUTTER
Dad, we came all this way...

Tommy smiles at his son. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

TOMMY
And I’m sure glad you did, kiddo... See you soon.

EXT TOMMY’S DUPLEX – LATER

Sutter and Aimee sit parked outside Tommy’s house. The rain is pounding down on the roof of the car. Sutter takes a big hit from his flask.

SUTTER
It’s getting pretty bad out. We should probably head back.

AIMEE
It’s only been a few hours. We can wait --

Sutter angrily turns on the ignition, quickly pulls away.
INT. SUTTER’S CAR - LATER

ANGLE ON SUTTER in the driver’s seat. The car is not moving. The only sound are the wipers sweeping back and forth.

REVEAL what Sutter is looking at: his father, right back at the BBQ/bar. Tommy tips back the last of his beer and laughs at something one of his buddies said.

BACK TO SUTTER. Frozen. Aimee doesn’t know what to say. Without a word, Sutter composes himself. Drives away.

We stay with them in the car. The silence continues. The wipers keep sweeping. Sutter looks like he’s about to burst. Aimee watches him, expecting the explosion any moment. She puts on the radio, tuning until she finds a baseball game. They listen for a few moments. Sutter angrily turns it off.

More silence. Sutter takes a long swig as he drives. Finally:

AIMEE
I’m sure he wanted to come back --

SUTTER

AIMEE
You saw her. She was in no condition to drive.

SUTTER

AIMEE
That’s probably what happened. If it wasn’t for her, he would have come right back.

SUTTER
Sure, and if he hadn’t cheated on mom then we’d still be a family and I’d be president of my Sunday school class and you and I would ride silver stallions to Pluto.

This shuts her down. Sutter glances over, feeling bad for snapping. Takes a deep breath and another drink.

AIMEE
Maybe we caught him on a bad day...

SUTTER
And maybe that’s just who he is. Huh? Maybe he’s been like that since day one.

(MORE)
SUTTER (CONT'D)
Just a selfish, lowlife, motherfucking asshole!

Sutter shakes his head in disgust at himself. Aimee stays silent. They listen to the rain pour down. Until:

AIMEE
Sutter.

SUTTER
What?!

AIMEE
I love you.

Sutter exhales. Not what he wants to hear right now.

AIMEE
Did you hear me?

Sutter still won’t engage.

AIMEE
I love you.

SUTTER
Stop saying that.

AIMEE
Why?

SUTTER
Because --

AIMEE
I want you to hear it. I love you.

SUTTER
You’re wrong.

Aimee bristles at this. But Sutter has been waiting to say it. Can’t stop now.

SUTTER
Come on, Aimee, you don’t love me. You’re just... drunk and you’re... grateful... someone came along and showed interest in you.

AIMEE
Don’t say that, Sutter. Don’t try to mess this up --

SUTTER
Mess what up? What do you think this is?

At which point a loud horn blares from an oncoming car.
AIMEE
Watch out!

All this time, the car has been swerving slowly into the other lane. Sutter quickly rights the wheel and the car fishtails in the other direction, the road slick and wet from the rain. With no seatbelt on, Aimee slips down into the floorboard as Sutter struggles to regain control.

The car sideswipes a concrete abutment before Sutter is finally able to wrestle it to a stop in the high grass off to the left, facing the wrong way (passenger door closest to the highway).

When the dust settles:

AIMEE
(peering up from the floor)
Are you alright?

SUTTER
What?

AIMER
Are you ok?

SUTTER
You’re asking me that? Jesus Christ, Aimee, no! I’m way fucking far from ok.

AIMEE
(moving in for a hug)
Thank god you’re not hurt.

SUTTER
(pushing her off)
What is wrong with you?! I nearly killed you and you wanna hug me?

AIMEE
I wanna make sure you’re --

SUTTER
You need to run, Aimee. You need to get as far away from me as you possibly can.

AIMEE
No.

SUTTER
They’re right about me. Everyone’s right.

AIMEE
Sutter, what are you --

SUTTER
Get out of the car.
AIMEE
No!
Sutter leans over and opens the passenger door.

SUTTER
Get out of the fucking car!

Aimee doesn’t move. Tears start to fall from her eyes. She bites her lip and finally gets out. Aimee stands there. On the side of the road, the door still open.

AIMEE
I’m sorry.

SUTTER
Jesus Christ, Aimee, what are you sorr--?

But he doesn’t get the rest of it out. An approaching car can’t see Aimee through the rain and the fog. She’s hit! Knocked off of her feet by the blow. Goes down hard.

And everything changes.

Sutter freaks, jumping out of the car, running as fast as he can to her side. Aimee lies in the grass, hair soaked, face caked in mud, blood dripping from her scalp. She isn’t moving.

SUTTER
Aimee, oh fuck, Aimee. What have I done?

Sutter kneels over her. Afraid to touch her. Falling apart.

SUTTER
Please, God, don’t do this. Oh please, fuck. I’ll do anything. I swear. I’ll never drink again just don’t let her go.

Finally Aimee opens her eyes. Seeing him, she still can’t help but smile. Then she collapses again.

SUTTER
Aimee!

INT HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER

Sutter waits, fidgeting, his right foot tapping nervously on the floor. Seems like he’s been there a while.

Finally a DOCTOR (40s, serious) leaves Aimee’s room. In the BACKGROUND we see Aimee’s Mom sitting at Aimee’s bedside. The Doctor approaches Sutter.

DOCTOR
The bone fragments were only partially split so it doesn’t require surgery.

(MORE)
DOCTOR (CONT'D)
That's the good news. The bad news is she suffered a minor concussion. There may be some dizziness so she should take it easy the next few days.

SUTTER
Yes sir.

The Doctor puts down his chart and looks hard at Sutter.

DOCTOR
She didn’t say much about what happened.

Sutter says nothing.

DOCTOR
(beat)
I’ll give you a choice, kid. The cops or your parents?

CUT TO:

INT HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Sutter waits. Through the glass of the room behind him we can see Sutter’s Mom arguing with the Doctor. The voices are muffled but he can hear clearly enough.

DOCTOR
Her blood alcohol level was twice the legal limit and I’d be willing to bet his was too. Did you know where he was tonight, Mrs. Keely?

MARY
What gives you the right to talk to me like that?

DOCTOR
I’m sorry if I sound harsh --

MARY
Don’t tell me how to be a parent! I work 15 hours a day to support my family.

DOCTOR
A lot of moms work hard, Mrs. Keely, and their kids don’t drink and drive.

Mary is silenced by this.

DOCTOR
Your son is lucky. And so is his girlfriend. Not everyone gets a second chance.

Mary doesn’t respond. Sutter hasn’t moved an inch.
INT MOM’S CAR - LATER

They drive silently. We stay on them for a while. Sutter looks at his Mom. She looks straight ahead. A mixture of anger and guilt on her face.

EXT/INT AIMEE’S HOUSE - DAY

Sutter rings the doorbell. Aimee’s Mom answers and immediately hugs him.

AIMEE’S MOM
There he is! The hero!

SUTTER
(uncomfortable)
Hi Mrs. Finecky.

Once inside Randi and Shane wave hello from the living room. Sutter waves back.

AIMEE’S MOM
Aimee’s in her room.

Sutter leaves them and heads to Aimee’s room.

INT AIMEE’S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aimee’s on the bed, reading. Sutter enters and sits on the end of the bed. He looks at her in her cast.

AIMEE
Should we talk about it?

Sutter’s face says he’d rather not.

AIMEE
I agree.

SUTTER
Aimee, I’m so sor --

She silences him with a kiss.

AIMEE
Let’s never speak of it again, ok? I don’t want anything getting in the way of St. Louis.

She touches his face with her hand. Sutter looks pained.

EXT CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sutter parks his car. Baseball game in the background. He’s about to go in to the 7/11 when out comes little Walter (from the first scene). Walter holds hands with his mother while sipping from a Big Gulp. Sutter stares at the image, unnerved.
FADE UP: “Pomp and Circumstance.” CUT TO:

EXT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONY - DAY

Where Aimee, still in a cast, grabs her diploma from the PRINCIPAL McNULTY. She turns to the crowd, waves, and walks on, taking her seat on the lawn amongst the rest of the graduates.

It’s a beautiful day and the grounds are packed with students and their families.

A few more students are called to get their diplomas. There’s still no sign of Sutter. Is he graduating?

PRINCIPAL
Sutter Keely.

There he is. Principal hands him the diploma. Students shout for him.

STUDENTS
Woo Sutter!

Someone else shouts:

STUDENT
Cartwheel!

ANOTHER STUDENT
Sing us a song!

Sutter pretends he doesn’t hear them. He walks off. Aimee excitedly claps. On the way to his seat, Sutter opens the diploma folder a tiny bit. It’s empty. He’s not surprised. Closes it before anyone else can see.

Sutter takes his seat. Aimee turns around to look at him. She’s never looked happier.

LATER. Aimee and Sutter are away from the crowd. Aimee takes out a flask and spikes her drink. She’s about to do the same for Sutter but he stops her.

AIMEE
Really? Why not?

SUTTER
Think I’ll just drink on the weekends from now on.

AIMEE
More for me.

Aimee takes a drink. Sutter watches her.

AIMEE
Is your family here?
SUTTER
I told them it was next week.

Aimee laughs. Sutter can’t help but smile at her. Krystal, standing with her family, calls Aimee over.

AIMEE
I should go say hi. Be right back.

She runs off. Sutter remains, alone for a beat or two. And then:

CASSIDY
Hey there graduate.

SUTTER
Hey Cass.

CASSIDY
How you doing?

SUTTER
I’m good. You?

CASSIDY
Ready for some news...? I’m not going to State anymore.

SUTTER
(surprised)
You’re staying here?

CASSIDY
Oh god no. I’m going with Marcus. California baby!

SUTTER
You’re... really? Isn’t that a little... sudden?

CASSIDY
We talked about it and we just... we’re doing it! Crazy, huh?

SUTTER
Well, that’s... that’s great.

CASSIDY
I know, it’s exciting! Like a whole new era in my life is beginning.

SUTTER
Very cool.

CASSIDY
And you know what Sutter, if it wasn’t for you and Aimee, going off together, I don’t think we would have done it.

(MORE)
CASSIDY (CONT'D)
But now it feels, I don’t know, it just feels right. So thank you.

Cassidy hugs him. Tight. Sutter is still surprised. Once she pulls away:

CASSIDY
You’ll stay in touch, won’t you? You’ll write us from St. Louis.

SUTTER
You got it.

Cassidy leaves. Sutter is alone again. He looks at Aimee, taking pictures with her Mom. He looks at his shoes. Runs his fingers through his hair.

EXT BUS STATION - DAY

The bus to St. Louis is already boarding. Aimee waits to the side, suitcase in hand. She’s nervous. Her mood is sinking. She checks her watch. The last passenger boards.

BUS DRIVER
Miss.

AIMEE
Just... two more minutes ok.

The Driver gets back on the bus. Aimee is nervous for a few more beats. And then she just starts to cry. The sadness overwhelms her. And then, just as quickly, she stops crying. She takes a few breaths, wills herself to be brave, picks up the suitcase and boards the bus.

As the doors close, and Aimee takes her seat, REVEAL Sutter has been watching this from a far. Tears in his eyes as well. The bus drives off in the distance. He watches it go.

INT SUTTER’S CAR - DAY

Driving. Trying not to be overcome with emotion. Silently convincing himself he’s done the right thing. And that he doesn’t need a drink.

He drives by a very seedy looking dive bar. He keeps driving. He looks in the rearview mirror, the bar still in view, beckoning.

INT SEEDY DIVE BAR - NIGHT

The lowest of the low. Dank, dark, and dusty. Two thuggish MEN play pool on a wrinkled table. Sutter sits at the bar next to a rumpled DRUNK in his late 60s. The BARTENDER has a wispy goatee and is missing some teeth. They’ve all been there a very long time.
SUTTER
Another round for the table.
(BARTENDER nods)
Thank you, Earl, thank you for serving me. This is better. Much, much better.

RUMPLED DRUNK
You’re a good guy, Sutter.

SUTTER
That’s what I think too. I agree.
(to BARTENDER)
What do you think? Was I wrong to let her go? Did I do the right thing?

BARTENDER
For you or for her?

The question doesn’t get to hang for too long as the Drunk chimes in.

RUMPLED DRUNK
You had to! You had to save that girl.

SUTTER
That’s what I did. I saved her.

RUMPLED DRUNK
You’re not wrong. You’re a hero. You’re a King!

SUTTER
That’s right! You’re exactly right.

RUMPLED DRUNK
Look at you, Suther. What are you 19, 20?

SUTTER
I am 18 years old.

RUMPLED DRUNK
Beautiful. You got your whole life ahead of you.

SUTTER
So do you, my man.

RUMPLED DRUNK
Not me. I’m old. My friends are gone. I’ve wasted all this time...

Sutter flinches at the words for a second but is able to dismisses them.

SUTTER
We’re your friends.
RUMPLED DRUNK
You are.

SUTTER
Absolutely.

RUMPLED DRUNK
Thank you boy. Then let’s have a drink. To friendship.

They toast.

EXT SUTTER’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sutter’s Lancer takes the turn into the driveway too fast, crashing into the mailbox. Sutter exits the vehicle, leaving it half on the lawn.

SUTTER
(re: damage)
Shit.

A light turns on inside the house. Mary comes outside, pulling a robe around herself.

MARY
What the hell?
(seeing the mailbox)
Sutter!?

Sutter ignores her. Mom watches him stumble towards the house.

MARY
Have you been drinking?

Sutter says nothing.

MARY
Jesus Christ! We just went through this. The hell is wrong with --

SUTTER
What do you care?

MARY
Excuse me?

SUTTER
You don’t care about me. You’ve never cared about me.

MARY
Sutter.
(beat)
Look, I’m sorry, ok? I know I haven’t always been there for you and I’m gonna try harder --
SUTTER
It’s cause I remind you of him.

MARY
What are you talking about?

SUTTER
That’s why you hate me. That’s why you can’t stand to look at me.

MARY
(stunned)
Sutter! How can you say that?! You’re my son!

SUTTER
I’m his son too. We’re exactly the same.

MARY
(beat)
You’re wrong... You’re nothing like him.

Sutter won’t listen. He storms past her and walks inside. Mom follows. She walks right past Sutter and into the kitchen. Sutter, about to climb the stairs, hears his mom rummaging in the other room. He stops. Mom reappears, handing him a piece of paper.

CU: the paper has an address on it.

SUTTER
What’s this?

MARY
Go to him. Then you’ll see.

Sutter looks at the slip.

SUTTER
I thought you didn’t --

MARY
I was trying to protect you from --
(beat)
I was wrong. Take this. Go see him. See for yourself how different you are.

Sutter is stunned by this.

SUTTER
I’ve already been.

Now it’s Mom’s turn to be surprised.

SUTTER
Holly gave me his number and... we drove there last week... You were right. He’s... you were right all along.
And Mary knows what Sutter is really saying.

MARY
You’re not your father.

Sutter tries to hold himself together but he can’t look his mother in the eye. Mary grabs him into a hug. Sutter allows it but doesn’t respond, not yet.

MARY
(beat)
Sutter listen to me. That man... that man’s never loved anyone but himself. His heart is this big. But you... you love everybody. You’ve got the biggest heart of anyone I know.

Sutter’s hit hard by this. Starts to lose his composure.

MARY
Remember 3rd grade, when Ricky was on crutches for a month. Who carried his books every day? Or when you were 10 and Rosemary Clark lost her mother. You invited her to live with us, said I’d be her new mom. Remember that? You’ve always been so special, Sutter. That’s why everyone loves you.

SUTTER
Nobody loves me Mom.

MARY
You’re wrong.

And now Mom is crying too. Holds him tighter.

MARY
You hear me, Sutter? You’re wrong.

And finally Sutter hugs back. He closes his eyes as they hold each other. Over her shoulder, we see him crumble the slip of paper in his hand.

CUT TO:

A COMPUTER SCREEN. “Describe a challenge, hardship or misfortune you have experienced in your life.”

Sutter sits at his desk. Eyes still wet. Reads on.

“What have you learned from this and how has it prepared you for the future?”

Sutter stares at it a beat. And then he starts to write.
SUTTER’S VOICE
My name is Sutter Keely and I’m 18 years old... Compared to other kids, I haven’t had that many hardships. Not really. Shit’s happened...

Sutter pauses, deletes “shit” and replaces it.

SUTTER’S VOICE
Stuff’s happened, sure, stuff always happens... but the real challenge in my life, the real hardship... is me. It’s always been me.

ANGLE ON SUTTER, deciding whether to continue. He does.

SUTTER’S VOICE
As long as I can remember, I’ve never NOT been afraid.

CUT TO:

Sutter behind the wheel. He doesn’t look afraid. And then the Big Gulp in hand. He takes a sip.

SUTTER’S VOICE

SERIES OF SHOTS: Cassidy angry with him, Sutter not knowing why; Sutter catching Cassidy with Marcus on the couch; the first time he sees Aimee;

SUTTER’S VOICE
I thought if I kept my guard up, focused on other things, other people...

SERIES OF SHOTS: Sutter bringing Walter to his mom; hooking Ricky up with Beth; coaching Aimee to shout and curse at the party;

SUTTER’S VOICE
...if I couldn’t even FEEL it... well then no harm would come to me.


SUTTER’S VOICE
I was wrong. Not only did I shut out the pain, I shut out everything. The good and the bad.

SERIES OF SHOTS: peacefully in bed with Aimee; Holly reaching out to him; the disappointment on Bob’s face as he has to let Sutter go; Aimee’s bus pulling away; Sutter and Mom hugging.
SUTTER’S VOICE
Until there was nothing.

BACK ON Sutter at his computer...

SUTTER’S VOICE
I’m not gonna do that anymore.

SERIES OF SHOTS: the future. Sutter empties his flask in the sink; Sutter uses a lighter to set the pennant ablaze, watches it burn; Sutter sitting at the kitchen table with Holly and Mom. Saying grace. All together.

SUTTER’S VOICE
It’s fine to just “live in the now.” But the best part about “now” is -- there’s another one tomorrow. I promise not to waste that one. Sincerely, Sutter Keely.

EXT COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY
A beautiful, sparkling day on a beautiful college campus.

SUTTER’S VOICE
P.S. I don’t know if this was due a long time ago. Probably was. But that’s fine. The truth is...

Aimee comes out of a classroom looking confident, secure. She says goodbye to friends and walks down the steps.

SUTTER’S VOICE
It may be too late for this essay...

And then she sees him. Standing there. Waiting for her. And he’s cleaned up too. Steady on his feet. Haircut.

SUTTER’S VOICE
...It’s not too late for me.

In his hand is Aimee’s purple ski jacket.

AIMEE
What are you doing here?

SUTTER
(beat)
You forgot your coat.

And before we ever know what happens next:

BLACK.